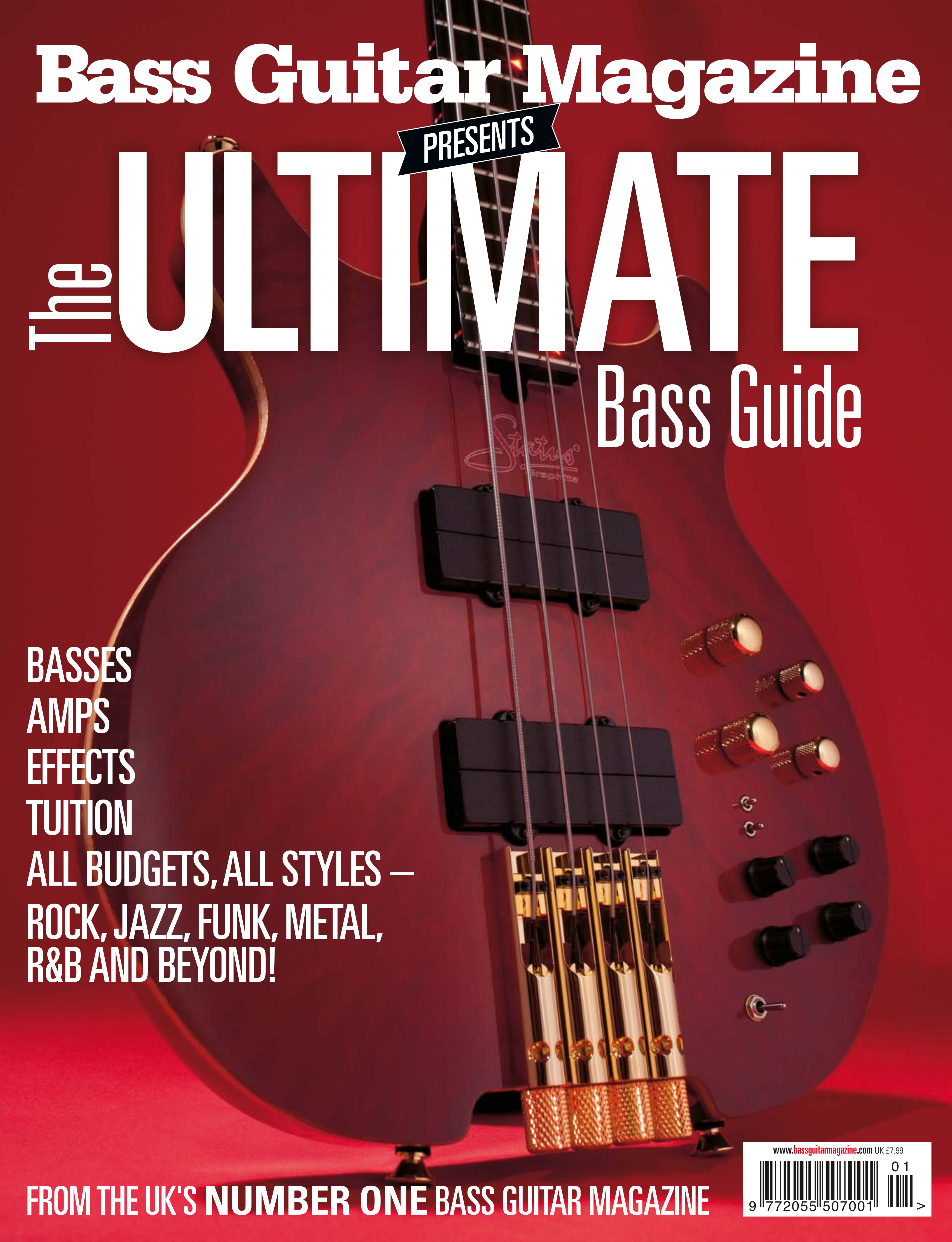


Bass Guitar Magazine

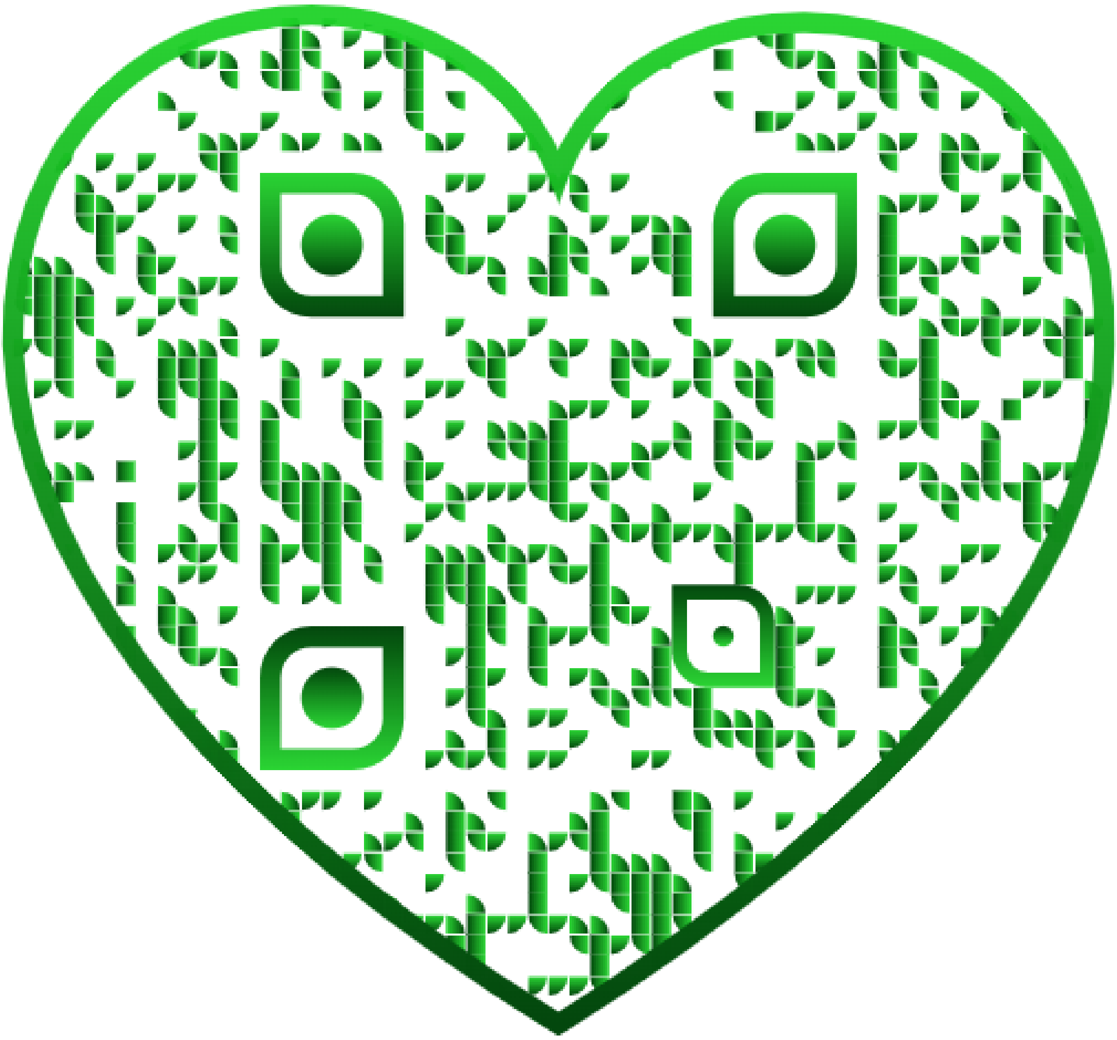
PRESENTS

The ULTIMATE Bass Guide

BASSES
AMPS
EFFECTS
TUITION
ALL BUDGETS, ALL STYLES –
ROCK, JAZZ, FUNK, METAL, R&B AND BEYOND!

FROM THE UK'S **NUMBER ONE** BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

www.bassguitarmagazine.com UK £7.99



PURE VINTAGE
Facebook.com/fendergbi
Twitter.com/fendergbi
©2014 FMIC. FENDER®, JAZZ BASS®, J-BASS® and the distinctive headstock designs commonly found on these guitars are registered trademarks of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All rights reserved.
AMERICAN Vintage SERIES
1975 JAZZ BASS® IN NATURAL
HANDMADE IN THE U.S.A.
FENDER.COM/AMERICAN-VINTAGE
Fender

Foreword

I got into bass to meet girls. Then I got into jazz and ruined the whole plan... It might be a silly joke, but at least I got into bass. It's the best thing that I ever did. Being a bass player allowed me to travel the world. My career as a bass player has put me on a permanent vacation for 40 years. I've played bass in concerts on tops of mountains, in theatres built by Greek architects 2000 years ago, next to tropical oceans, near active volcanos, in castles, pubs, parking lots and palaces. I once played on the Asian continent, and then took a boat to return to my hotel in Europe. I've been paid a lot of money and I've been ripped off more than once. Some of the best musicians in the world have given me permission to record with them. I'm known for fusion, but you've also heard me on rock and pop music whose names I was sworn never to mention by the producers that hired me. (And I never will. My word is my contract and their regular bass players wouldn't like it.) My bass playing has been heard by royalty, politicians, actors, and I have dined on some of the best cuisine in the world. I've filled up several US passports with visas and entry stamps. I've been on a gazillion airplanes, taxis, limos, boats and vans, and slept in some of the most luxurious hotels in the world. Almost everyone I have met over the years has been wonderful, kind, honest, and into music as much I am.

This guide might offer a little advice for you to join me in this industry. *Bass Guitar Magazine* has compiled a bunch of columns, bass reviews and artist interviews for you in the ultimate bass guitar resource. In these pages you will discover stories, like mine, that will inspire you to pursue this great and strange career. Certainly you will be enlightened, entertained, and maybe a little outraged.

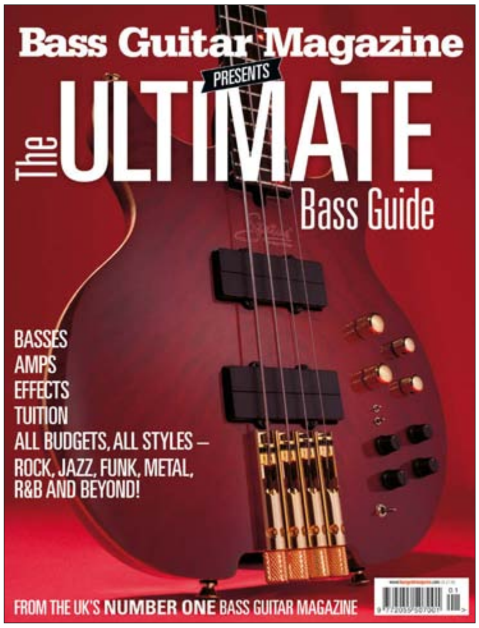
Enjoy this compendium, and remember that all professional musicians share my experiences, and then some. Maybe you can extract a few bits of information to guide you toward a similar experience as mine has been. Enjoy this bookazine and remember that music is something that you have to work for. Everything great is!

Jeff Berlin
Florida, 2014

PS I did meet some pretty nice girls over the years. Even a funny-looking guy like me has some pretty amazing stories to share when I get a couple of pints in me…

CONTENTS

BASS GIUTAR MAGAZINE PRESENTS…
THE ULTIMATE BASS GUIDE



EDITOR Joel McIver, joel@blazepublishing.co.uk
SUB-EDITOR Nick Robbins
CONTRIBUTORS Mike Brooks, Dave Clarke, Stuart Clayton, Ben Cooper, Jon D'Auria, David Etheridge, Paul Geary, Ian Glasper, Joel Graham, Janek Gwizdala, Mike Hine, Dave Marks, Michael McKeegan, Kevin Sanders, Rob Statham, Jack Stevens
GRAPHIC DESIGN Steve Dawson
AD DESIGN Katherine McArdle
PHOTOGRAPHY OF YOLANDA CHARLES, MARK KING, PETER HOOK, LARRY GRAHAM: Tina K
GEAR PHOTOGRAPHY: Eckie
COVER IMAGE: Status Kingbass Paramatrix
ADVERTISING Hannah Benson
OPERATIONS DIRECTOR James Folkard
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER Ruth Burgess
PUBLISHER Wes Stanton
ACCOUNTS Dave Deo
SUBSCRIPTIONS subs@blazepublishing.co.uk, 01926 339808

Printed in the UK © Blaze Publishing Ltd 2014.
All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, stored in a retrieval system or integrated into any other publication, database or commercial program without the express permission of the publishers in writing. Under no circumstances should this publication and its contents be sold, loaned out or used by way of trade, or stored or transmitted as an electronic file without the publishers prior written approval.

DISCLAIMER
While Blaze Publishing Ltd prides itself on the quality of the information its publications provide, the company reserves the right not to be held legally responsible for any mistakes or inaccuracies found within the text of this publication.
Bass Guitar Magazine is an independent publication and as such does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of manufacturers or distributors of the products contained within. All trademarks are acknowledged.

DISTRIBUTION
Distributed to the news trade by Comag Magazine Marketing, West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 7QE

PUBLISHED BY
Blaze Publishing Ltd. Lawrence House, Morrell Street, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 5SZ
***Bass Guitar Magazine* is proud to support the Music Industries Association.**

blaze PUBLISHING
mia Music Industries Association

Welcome, bass fan, to *Bass Guitar Magazine Presents… The Ultimate Bass Guide*, in which you're about to encounter gear advice, performance tips and all manner of professional help to accompany you on your way to being a better bass player. *Bass Guitar Magazine* occupies a unique position, we're proud to say: we recently hit our 100th issue and, just as it was at issue one back in 2002, our mission is to bring you the very best the bass world has to offer. That extends as far as this bookazine, which gathers as much bass-related content as we could pack into its pages. We've gone through the last couple of years of *BGM* and selected the very best and most useful columns, reviews and interviews in order to make *The Ultimate Bass Guide* truly, well, ultimate. Whether you play at beginner, intermediate or advanced level, whether you prefer rock or funk to jazz and R&B, and no matter what your budget, this unique guide has something for you. Enjoy the ride, and we'll see you at the London Bass Guitar Show held annually each March, where the world of bass meets for a couple of days that no bass player can afford to miss.
Joel McIver, editor

www.bassguitarmagazine.com
www.londonbassguitarshow.com
www.facebook.com/bassguitarmagazine
www.facebook.com/londonbassguitarshow
@bassguitarmagazine
@londonbassguitarshow

Note: *Gear prices fluctuate, of course, and you may find that the costs of various items have changed since they were originally reviewed – so check before you order.*

03 Foreword
The great Jeff Berlin shares his welcoming wisdom

06 How To Use This Bookazine…
What this here bookazine is all about

07 Glossary
The bass terms you'll need if you want to sound cool backstage

08 Bass Guitar Guide
Dive into the best of the bass world, starting here…

09 25 Basses Under £500
A quarter-century of affordable axes that you need to try today – and if you're thinking that low budget means low quality, think again

16 Ibanez SRI200E Premier
Slick lines, killer tones and tasty electronics: all for less than a grand

20 Gordon-Smith Gryphon
This mythical beast rose from the ashes last year. We hail its return

23 Enfield Lionheart 4 and 5
Loaded with Sims' amazing Super Quad pickup system, this bass has a serious roar

26 Music Man Classic Sabre
A winning formula, relaunched to mass acclaim. We run it through its paces

29 Carvin Icon
Looking good and feeling iconic

32 Status Kingbass Paramatrix
At the thick end of four grand, Mark King's signature bass is a serious proposition.

36 Warwick Thumb SC6
Now we're talking big numbers. At £4700 and change, Warwick's behemoth six-string is a force unto itself…

40 Ritter R8
£6450 for this work of art? We'll do our best to persuade you

44 Fodera Matt Garrison
Turn to page 44 to see what this utterly superb Fodera will cost you. Got a spare arm and leg?

47 Bass Amps Guide
A trip into sound. Deep, loud sound: the kind that drowns out guitarists...
48 TC Electronic BH250
A head so portable you can practically carry it in your wallet? This we must see
50 EBS Reidmar 250 and Classic Line
The Swedes are coming. To the battlements!
54 Hughes & Kettner Basskick series
Mid-priced amplification, above-average quality. Music to our ears
57 Ampeg PF800 head and PF210HE cab
The grandaddy of all bass manufacturers, still as solid as ever
59 Markbass CMD JB Players School combo
500 nicker for an amp with Jeff Berlin's school's name on it? We'll take Markbass up on that
61 EA iAmp Micro Head
Another eminently tiny (but loud) amp for those who dislike osteopathy bills
64 Gallien-Krueger MB800
Can GK deliver the goods? Do bass strings snap after you boil them?
68 Aguilar Tonehammer 350 head and SL112 cab
Get a load of New York's finest with this sassy amp/cab rig
72 Orange AD200B MKIII head and OBC810 head
It's Glenn Hughes's signature rig. Does the Purple still reign?
76 Acoustic Image S4 Ten2 Double Bass Combo
The standup bass needs its own particular amp. This is it!

78 Bass Effects Guide
Whatever the tone, you'll find it here...
79 Mooer Multi-FX and Sweeper Filter
Ooer, it's a Mooer! Sorry. You'll love this: we certainly did.
80 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff and Darkglass Microtubes
Two amazing pieces of bass FX on one page. No need to thank us
81 Eden i90 Chorus
We do love a nice chorus round *BGM's* way. No, it doesn't sound 80s...
82 Electro-Harmonix Superego Synth
You do want your bass guitar to sound like a synth bass. You really do
84 Diamond Compressor and Aphex Xciter
Time to compress that tone and then jazz it up
86 EBS Billy Sheehan Drive
The Boss has his own overdrive. We step reverently on it
88 Roger Mayer Voodoo
Jimi Hendrix used Mayer FX. Enough said
91 Sonuus Wahoo
This amazing bit of kit does pretty much everything. Yes, we said it
92 Cornell Pedalamp
This futuristic bit of kit looks like nothing else on Planet Bass... and costs nearly £700!

97 Bass Interviews
Meet the finest bass players known to man... or roadie
98 Yolanda Charles
From Robbie Williams to her own funky creations, Yolanda is the bass player's bass player
102 Mark King
What more needs to be said about King Mark? The man is the most famous thumb-slapper ever to come out of Britain...
106 Tom Hamilton
There's stadium bands. And there's Aerosmith. We meet the biggest band, like, ever
110 Marcus Miller
The man in the hat continues to astound after all these years. Say hello!
114 Freekbass
Looking for Bootsy's modern reincarnation? Here he is
116 Jeff Ament
Pearl Jam's bassist reveals his side project
118 Peter Hook
Hooky looks back on his impressive life and times as Manchester's finest
122 Larry Graham
The master! That is all

128 Bass Tuition Section
Begin your journey to better bass playing here
129 Bass Tutors
Meet the team!
130 Beginner's Theory: Jack Stevens
132 Beginner's Technique: Paul Geary
136 Beginner's Theory: Jack Stevens
138 Beginner's Technique: Paul Geary
140 Intermediate Technique: Rob Statham
142 Intermediate Theory: Janek Gwizdala
144 Intermediate Technique: Rob Statham
146 Intermediate Theory: Janek Gwizdala
149 Advanced Technique: Dave Marks
150 Double Bass Technique: David Etheridge
152 Advanced Technique: Dave Marks
154 Advanced Technique: Dave Marks
156 Advanced Technique: Dave Marks
158 I Want To Play Like... Stu Hamm
160 Advanced Technique: Dave Marks

162 Afterword
Steve Lawson bids us farewell... until next time!

20
Gordon-Smith Gryphon

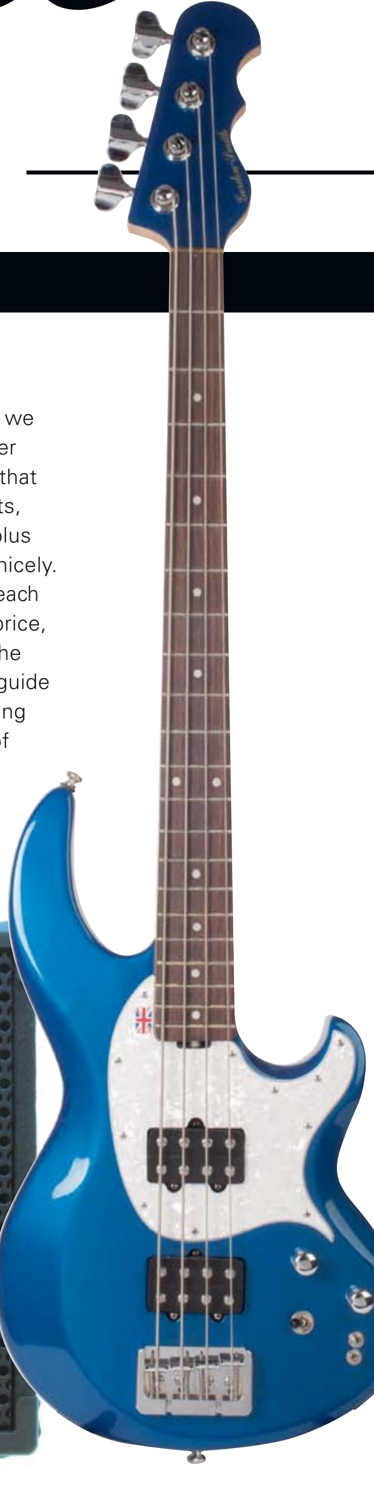
98
Yolanda Charles

118
Peter Hook

How to use this guide

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS ONE-OFF GUIDE TO THE AMAZING WORLD OF THE LOW END

When we were assembling *The Ultimate Bass Guide* in our secret command bunker deep in the Arctic circle, we asked ourselves what bass players need to know. After several cases of whiskey we came to the conclusion that a combination of bass guitars, bass amps, bass effects, bass tuition and the odd bit of tone and double bass education – plus interviews with the greats of the bass world – would do the trick nicely. However, to make this guide truly indispensable, we've arranged each of the bass, amp and FX sections in ascending order by retail price, so each zone begins with affordable gear before climbing the fiscal cliff to the more expensive items. The result is a guide that's tailored for every pocket, whether you're looking for a decent bass under £500 (we've profiled 25 of them!), a reliable mid-market instrument or a breathtakingly luxurious instrument that will make your accountant weak at the knees. Have at it!



Glossary

THE VOCABULARY YOU'LL NEED TO PERUSE THIS GUIDE TO ALL THINGS BASS-RELATED

ACTIVE – An active bass has a battery-powered EQ system that is boosted at the top and bottom end, when compared to its passive equivalent.

BATTERY COMPARTMENT – Where the battery lives, duh. Usually located on the back of the bass.

BODY – The main portion of the bass, with a neck, bridge and controls attached to it. Much is made by experts of the tonal qualities of the woods used for the body, and the concomitant impact of their use on a) the environment and b) your wallet

BOLT-ON – Where the neck joins the body, assuming separate components are used instead of a single, neck-through construction. Bolts used here number from four and continue upwards.

BOOST – The option available on many basses to give the top or bottom end of the frequency range some extra muscle.

BRIDGE – The metal unit at the bottom of the bass where the strings slide in. These range from a simple piece of metal to a complex, tank-like structure.

'BRIDGE OF SIGHS' – The curious metal cover fitted over a pickup on Rickenbackers and other traditional basses. Often removed from bass and thrown away after purchase.

CAB – Cabinet, or speaker. The loud part of your amp.

COIL TAP – The option with certain pickups to reduce the wiring in the live circuit, thus enabling a different sound.

COMBO – An amp where the head and cab are combined in a single unit.

DRIVE – Overdrive, fuzz or distortion: when your bass sound becomes crunchy via an effects pedal or knackered speaker.

'DUSTY END' – An amusing title for the area of the fingerboard to the right of the 12th fret, implying that higher notes are rarely played. Not true if you play fusion.

EQ – The mix of bass, mid and treble frequencies in the your sound: also the controls available to adjust said mix. On bass guitars, EQ varies from a simple tone control to a vast array of switches and pots which require a PhD to navigate.

FILTER – An envelope filter: an effect which lends a funky, synthesised tone to your sound.

FINGERBOARD – That long strip of wood with frets on it, glued to the neck.

FINGERSTYLE – The act of playing bass with your fingers, rather than with a pick or plectrum. Both styles have their adherents: both sides secretly despise the other.

FRETTED/FRETLESS – Basses come with and without frets. With a fretless bass you can make interesting microtonal adjustments while the audience wonders why you're playing out of tune.

HEAD – The amplifier which drives your cabinet. Can be powered with tubes or transistors.

HEADLESS – A bass which has no headstock: Status Graphite are the best-known.

HEADSTOCK – The chunk of wood at the end of the neck which stops your hand sliding off.

HIPSHOT – A popular brand of detuner which allows you to instantly add greater range.

HOOK – Either James Jamerson's finger (he plucked his bass strings using only one) or a famous bassist from Manchester.

HUMBUCKER – A pickup whose inner wiring system is designed to cancel the humming that sometimes accompanies the operation of standard systems.

JACO-ESQUE – A growling, fretless bass sound like that of the late Jaco Pastorius.

JAMERSON-STYLE – A Motown-alike root/fourths/fifths bass-line played with great economy and melodic awareness, preferably fingerstyle, in the style of the late James Jamerson.

J-BASS – A Fender Jazz bass.

J-STYLE – When used to describe a bass guitar neck, this means slim and highly playable.

MACHINE HEADS (ALSO TUNERS) – The sticky-out metal things that change the pitch of the strings. As in, "If that guitarist bumps into my machine heads one more time, he's a dead man."

NECK – The long thin bit of the bass beneath the strings. Possibly the most important part of any bass, it determines how playable your instrument is.

NECK-THROUGH (OR THRU) – A bass body and neck formed from a single chunk of wood. Understandably expensive.

PASSIVE – The opposite of active.

P-BASS – A Fender Precision, the first and for many, the greatest bass guitar invented.

P-STYLE – Of a pickup, usually a split design with two offset units.

PICKUP CONFIGURATION – The number and layout of pickup units on your bass, from a single P-style pickup to a double single-coil setup like a Jazz, or a single or double humbucker configuration.

POP/POPPING – Pulling a string up with your finger and allowing it to snap back for a funky 'popped' effect.

POT – The controls on your bass which determine your volume and tone. Also a substance which, when inhaled, makes your drummer play at ever decreasing tempos.

REGISTER – Frequency: you can play notes in the upper, mid or lower registers.

SLAP/SLAPPING – Hitting a string with the edge of your thumb (or rarely, finger) so that it bounces rapidly off a fret.

'THUMB OF DOOM' – A digit belonging to the hand of Primus bassist Les Claypool.

Bass Guitar Guide

YOU'RE THE CORE OF ANY BAND AND THEY KNOW IT. WITHOUT A BASS PLAYER, ANY BAND SOUNDS THIN AND LOOKS NOWHERE NEAR AS COOL. WONDERING WHICH AXE IS FOR YOU? WONDER NO MORE . . .

Times have changed in the bass guitar world. Gone are the days when a simple four-string was all that was available. Five, six, seven, eight and more strings are at anyone's disposal these days. Another relatively recent development is that cheap Asian basses don't have to suck: in the 80s and before, bassists tended to assume that low-budget also meant low quality. Well, none of that applies these days: thanks to the evolution of mass production technology, a sub-£150 bass from India or Korea is almost (almost being the operative word!) guaranteed to do its job with the minimum of hassle.

At the same time, the market is packed to the brim with upmarket basses, made by hand from the finest eco-friendly materials by renowned luthiers who will be all too happy to charge you the price of a family car for their work. You'll be left poorer, but in possession of a truly unique artefact that you can bequeath to your offspring, or alternatively to the Hard Rock Cafe if you get famous. In between these poles there are literally thousands of mid-budget options for bass players of more or less any string, wood and electronics preference.

Where to go for guidance about your bass choice? Why, *Bass Guitar Magazine* of course, and in particular our review section, where we aim to cover as many different bass configurations and quality levels as possible. Here we've distilled a series of instrument reviews into a single, easy-to-use gear section – easy because it starts at the affordable end (less than £500) and goes all the way to super-expensive basses which will make your drummer jealous and your bank manager wince. Enjoy!

BASSES ON A BUDGET

AS WE ALL KNOW, THERE'S A RECESSION ON. WHAT THE HELL IS A BASSIST TO DO? RELAX – HERE'S THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO YOUR FIRST BASS GUITAR, OR IF YOU NEED AN AFFORDABLE BACKUP FOR YOUR PRICEY PRIDE AND JOY

WORDS: BEN COOPER

These days the sheer choice of instruments available to the bass-buying public is quite simply staggering. From a bewildering variety of Fender Jazz and Precision knock-offs, to seven-string fretless beasts that will set you back several thousand pounds, the choice on offer has never been broader. Yes sir (or madam), the days of "Would you like a Fender or, er... a Fender?" are well and truly gone.

One of the most competitive sectors of the market is the sub-500 quid zone, as it captures a wide variety of players, not simply beginners. The quality of instruments made in the east has taken quantum leaps in recent years, and with the much cheaper manufacturing costs associated with the workforce in that region, it's now possible to get a genuinely high-quality bass for well under the £500 mark. This means that even those of us lucky enough to own, say, an American-built deluxe Precision or a hand-built luthier's instrument, can choose instruments in this price bracket for a solid gigging workhorse or backup to our beloved bass. And it's not just the bog-standard garden variety four-string bass we're talking about, either. If you're looking to dabble in fretless or five-string bass, but don't want to shell out big money on one at first, then there are many options out there for you.

Due to the sheer quantity of instruments released by the multitude of manufacturers out there, browsing can be a daunting task, so we've collated a list in alphabetical order by manufacturer of 25 sub-£500 instruments that we feel are worthy of your attention. A feature like this can't hope to include everything out there, of course, and prices are obviously subject to change, so check before you buy...

BASS COLLECTION LIZZY BASS

£385

MANUFACTURER|Bass Collection
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|Korea
BODY|Basswood
NECK|Maple
NUT WIDTH|41mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|20 x sixties style
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Open gear
BRIDGE|Babicz Full Contact Hardware
PICKUPS|Proprietary
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Passive,1 volume, 1 tone
HARDWARE|Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS|c/o Power Bass colour chart

No prizes for guessing where this instrument takes its cues from. Essentially a modification of Bass Collection's Power Bass, a Precision clone, the Lizzy bass has that classic P-Bass look with the added cool factor of the mirrored pick guard. The bass isn't just about looks though, with some serious design budget thrown into its tone circuit and neck. Sure this doesn't have the playability of a fully-fledged Precision, but there's no mistaking that super-cool look, which will transform the budding bass player into a Phil Lynott.

We love the black fingerboard finish, complemented by the silver hardware, and you've always got Bass Collection's reputation to rely on.

CONTACT | www.basscentre.com

BC RICH PAOLO GREGOLETTO SIGNATURE WARLOCK

£485

MANUFACTURER|BC Rich
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|China
BODY|Mahogany
NECK|Maple
NUT WIDTH|43mm
FRETBOARD|Ebony
FRETS|24 Jumbo
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|BC Rich Die Cast
BRIDGE|Adjustable Stop
PICKUPS|BC Rich BDSM Bass Humbuckers
CONTROLS|2 volume, 1 tone
HARDWARE|Black
FINISH OPTIONS|Natural (Spalted)

If you're looking for an out-and-out metal machine then the Trivium bassist's signature model from the leading manufacturer of pointy basses and guitars, BC Rich, has to be the one for you. Its mahogany body and maple neck means this bass has plenty of guts, while the twin humbuckers will give you all the aggressive sounds you could desire.

The natural-style finish makes it a bit different from the usual black that is so strongly associated with BC Rich instruments, but this is still a headbanger's dream. We can't guarantee that you'll be transformed into a rock god overnight however.

CONTACT | www.rosetti.co.uk, 01376 550033, sales@rosetti.co.uk

DANELECTRO 58 LONGHORN

£399

MANUFACTURER|Danelectro
MODEL|Longhorn
BODY|Masonite, laminated wood frame
NECK|Maple, bolt on
BINDING|N/A
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|24
SCALE LENGTH|30.5"
INLAYS|Dots
TUNERS|Kluson Style, cream plastic buttons
BRIDGE|Rosewood Bridge Saddle
PICKUPS|2x Lipstick alnico magnets
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Dual Concentrics, Volume, Tone
HARDWARE|Chrome/Cream
FINISH OPTIONS|Copperburst

For pure retro charm the Longhorn has to rate near the top of the tree. With its short scale length, the Longhorn is an easy play and would be ideal for the smaller framed player, which is ironic in some regards given that the not-insubstantial John Entwistle used to play these basses in the early to mid-60s. The plywood body, topped with masonite, makes this instrument incredibly light, almost alarmingly so, and yet it still delivers high-quality tones from its passive lipstick tube pickups. Sonically the Longhorn isn't comparable to the usual suspects because it has a unique tone; the instrument has a cutting high-end sound, which must be why the Ox enjoyed it so much.

CONTACT | www.danelectro.com and www.jhs.co.uk/danelectroguitars.html

DEAN EDGE 10A PJ SKULL CRUSHER

£299

MANUFACTURER|Dean Guitars
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|China
BODY|Basswood
NECK|Maple
NUT WIDTH|40mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|22
SCALE LENGTH|35"
TUNERS|Sealed Die Cast Black
BRIDGE|Die Cast Black
PICKUPS|DMT designed PJ Pickups
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Active 2 band EQ
HARDWARE|Black
FINISH OPTIONS|Skull Crusher

If you're looking for something understated and classic, then you'd best look elsewhere, as the sole finish option on this bass screams metal. The Skull Crusher offers fantastic value for money at just £299. You get the jack-of-all-trades pickups combination of a Fender Precision-style humbucker in the neck position coupled to a single coil Fender Jazz-style pickup at the bridge, meaning you can get deep and throaty rock tones, and added edge and punch from the bridge pickup. The Skull Crusher also features active electronics, with bass and treble controls, which at this price is really excellent value. It might not be to everyone's taste visually, but it certainly nails its colours to the mast.

CONTACT | www.deanguitars.uk.com sales@bill-lewington.com

ENCORE BLASTER

£159

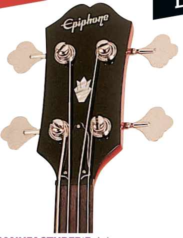
MANUFACTURER|Encore
BODY|Solid Wuton tonewood, vintage comfort contoured
NECK|Vintage profile maple
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|20
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Guitar Tech chrome, with authentic 'Elephant Ear'-shaped keys
BRIDGE|Guitar Tech fully intonatable face-mounted with steel baseplate and individual saddles
PICKUPS|Guitar Tech split single coil
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|1 x Volume/ 1 x Tone
HARDWARE|Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS|Right-handers: Black, Sunburst, Vintage White. Lefties: Black

If you want something cheap and cheerful for a knock-around bass, or perhaps if your kid is looking to take up the bass, then the Encore Blaster is the perfect solution. The general build quality is fine for the money, and it's certainly not going to break the bank. However, the Blaster also comes in a pack that, for £229, includes a 10-watt practice amp, a Qwik Tune Tuner, a Kinsman Carry Bag, a Kinsman Guitar Stand, a GYC Guitar Lead, a Guitar Tech Guitar Strap, an Encore Tutorial DVD, a pick and a tutor listing. That's a full beginner's set-up for less than most of the basses in this feature. While the instrument is basic, it's hard to think of a more cost-effective way for beginners to test the waters.

CONTACT | www.jhs.co.uk/encorebass.html

EPIPHONE EB3

£219



MANUFACTURER|Epiphone
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|China
BODY|Mahogany
NECK|Mahogany, Set, Slim Taper D Profile
NUT WIDTH|42mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood 12" Radius
FRETS|22, Medium Jumbo
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Open Gear, nickel plated
BRIDGE|3-Point
PICKUPS|Sidewinder HB (neck), NYT Bass Mini HB (bridge)
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|2-Volume, 2-Tone, 3-Way Selector Switch
HARDWARE|Nickel
FINISH OPTIONS|EB, CH

The Gibson EB3 ranks right up there with the Fender Precision and Jazz in terms of iconic design.

A big hit with players in the 1960s, the EB3 had a thudding tone all of its own, thanks to the deep bass pumped out by the enormous neck position humbucker (which truly earns its name by being right up against the end of the fretboard), and the biting treble tones from the bridge position pickup.

The Epiphone version has the looks and sounds without the hefty price tag. A solid mahogany body makes this a relatively weighty bass, and its set neck construction gives it plenty of sustain.

CONTACT | www.epiphone.com

FRESHMAN FA1BN

£359

MANUFACTURER | Freshman Guitars
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | China
BODY | Jumbo cutaway – A-grade Canadian Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides
NUT WIDTH | 43mm
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
FRETS | 22
SCALE LENGTH | 32"
TUNERS | Nickel machine heads
BRIDGE | Rosewood
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | Fishman Isys 201 System
FINISH OPTIONS | Natural/Black Gloss

Well, if we actually had summers to speak of here in the UK, the Freshman FA1BN would be the ideal beach party bass. Of course, given the usual hammering rain there's not much chance of that, but the FA1BN is still perfect for those acoustic moments. Its generous jumbo body shape means that the bass resonates well acoustically, aided in no small part by the A grade solid Sitka spruce top. The addition of a Fishman iSys pickup system means the plugged-in sound is great too. The iSys features a built-in tuner, which works extremely well, and a phase switch for tackling the feedback that can plague amplified acoustic instruments when played at volume.

CONTACT | www.freshmanguitars.co.uk

GRETSCH G2220 JUNIOR JET BASS II

£287

MANUFACTURER | Gretsch
BODY | Basswood
NECK | Maple
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
FRETS | 20, Medium Jumbo
SCALE LENGTH | 30.3"
TUNERS | Enclosed die-cast tuners
BRIDGE | Standard four-Saddle
PICKUPS | Gretsch Mini Humbucking Bridge, Gretsch Mini Humbucking Neck
CONTROLS | Master Volume, Master Tone
HARDWARE | Chrome

Gretsch is a name more strongly associated with those Bigsby-equipped hollowbody electric guitars beloved of country and roots guitarists than with the bass. However the Junior Jet offers good tones for a relatively meagre amount of money.

It's short scale, so works well for the smaller player, and also has that midrange focus and thumpy sound associated with shorter scale length basses. This is a bass that gives you some classic vintage tones from its pickups. The Junior Jet's tone range is its strongest suit, in fact, and anyone interested in strutting their stuff in a roots band is strongly advised to give it a go. Perfect for Johnny Cash impressions.

CONTACT | www.gretsch.com

ESP LTD D-4

£479

MANUFACTURER | ESP
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | Indonesia
BODY | Merbau
NECK | 5 Piece Mahogany/Maple
NUT WIDTH | 40mm
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
FRETS | 24 J Frets
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
TUNERS | Grover
BRIDGE | ESP BB-604 w/ String-thru-body
PICKUPS | ESP SB-4 (Bridge & Neck)
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS Bass (Cut/Boost), Mid (Cut/Boost), Treble (Cut/Boost), Master Volume, Balance
HARDWARE | Black Nickel
FINISH OPTIONS | Natural Satin

With its stylish looks the LTD D-4 is a pure rock machine, but it's got so much more going for it than mere lines. For under £500 you get neck-through body construction and a string-through bridge, all of which means you get incredible sustain from this bass.

The neck is slim, fast and ultra-playable, making it perfect for players who need to execute fleet-fingered runs to keep up with the guitarists.

The bass also has active electronics, which ensures that you can coax pretty much any sound you can imagine from the bass, and the balance control allows you to pan between the two humbuckers – meaning that sound shaping mid-gig has never been easier.

CONTACT | Selectron (UK) Ltd, 01795 419460
www.selectron-uk.co.uk , www.espguitars.co.uk

FENDER MODERN PLAYER JAGUAR

£454

MANUFACTURER | Fender
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | China
BODY | Koto
NECK | Maple, bolt-on
NUT WIDTH | 42mm
FRETBOARD | Maple
FRETS | 20 jumbo
SCALE LENGTH | 24"
TUNERS | Standard open gear
BRIDGE | Four-Saddle Vintage-Style with Brass Saddles
PICKUPS | Modern Player single coil Jazz bass (bridge), Modern Player split single-coil Precision bass (middle)
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | Volume x2, Master Tone
HARDWARE | Nickel/Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS | Chocolate Burst, Red Transparent, Black Transparent

Leo Fender is where it all started, and naturally Fender basses have been top-sellers ever since their inception. If you want to grab yourself a slice of the action, but can't quite stretch to the American custom shop Precision of your dreams, then check out this stripped down and funky Jaguar bass in the Modern Player line, Fender's new entry level series. The body shape may not be for everyone, but if you want something a bit different the Jaguar will certainly get you noticed. The P/J pickup configuration means you've got a huge tonal palette on offer here. The neck has a slender Jazz profile making it an easy play, and it has that familiar Fender quality across the whole bass.

CONTACT | www.fender.com

JACKSON JS3 CONCERT
£298

MANUFACTURER|Jackson
BODY|Indian cedro or basswood
NECK|Three-piece Maple
NUT WIDTH|41.3mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|24
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Jackson non-locking
BRIDGE|Jackson high-mass bridge
PICKUPS|Jackson humbuckers (neck and bridge)
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Three-band active tone circuit, Neck Volume, Bridge Volume, Bass, Mid, Treble
HARDWARE|Black
FINISH OPTIONS|Black, Quicksilver, Trasnparent Blue, Transparent Red

There was a time when Jackson basses, with their pointy headstocks and sharkfin inlays, were standard issue for rock and metal players. The JS3 is aimed at the bassist on a budget who wants grinding rock tones and much more. Thanks to the twin active humbuckers, and three-band EQ, the JS3 can be much more than just a rock machine, but it has an inherently gritty midrange bark that makes it suited to the heavier end of the musical spectrum more than anything else.

As you'd expect from a bass aimed at the metal market the bass is a quick and easy play, making maximum riffage an absolute pleasure. Not only that, the evil Jackson headstock is perfect for fending off stage invaders.

CONTACT | www.jacksonguitars.com

MUSIC MAN STERLING SUB RAY 4
£319.99

MANUFACTURER|Music Man
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|Indonesia
BODY|Basswood
NECK|Maple [redacted]
NUT WIDTH|38mm
FRETBOARD|Maple or rosewood
FRETS|21 [redacted]
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Enclosed
BRIDGE|Heavy duty chrome adjustable
PICKUPS|Humbucker
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Two-band active pre amp, volume
HARDWARE|Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS|Gloss or satin

A standard Stingray, built in California, will set you back a pretty penny indeed and most would agree it would be money well spent, but for those on a tighter budget the Sub Ray 4 lets you get a slice of that classic Stingray look and feel.

That iconic eight-pole humbucker delivers surprisingly meaty tones and the active two-band EQ lets you boost and cut your bass and treble to get the tone you need. A six-bolt neck join ensures maximum stability for the silky satin-finished neck.

OK, so it's not a classic Stingray, but for less than £320 this could be the best value bass out there.

CONTACT | www.music-man.com

IBANEZ SR300 - IPT
£300

MANUFACTURER|Ibanez
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|Indonesia
BODY|Agathis
NECK|Maple
NUT WIDTH|38mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|24
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Sealed die cast
BRIDGE|Accu-cast B120
PICKUPS|CAP EXF N-2
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Master volume, pickup balance, bass, mid and treble boost/cut controls.
HARDWARE|Black

With a range of big name endorsees, the Soundgears have a name for versatility as well as affordability.

What's most remarkable about this bass isn't the typical Ibanez build quality, or the subtle but attractive Iron Pewter finish, but the active electronics. With a three-band EQ you can coax a huge range of tones from the Ibanez EXF-4 pickups, and with a bit of judicious tweaking you can get deep, dubby reggae and percussive modern metal tones, all from one bass. The SR300 also features a Style Sweeper control, essentially a mid-range frequency control that adjusts the mids so you can get a workable finger/pick/slap tone from a single knob.

CONTACT | Headstock Distribution
www.headstockdistribution.com

EPIPHONE THUNDERBIRD IV
£219

MANUFACTURER|Epiphone
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|Indonesia/China
BODY|Mahogany
NECK|Mahogany
NUT WIDTH|38mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood. 12" radius
FRETS|20
SCALE LENGTH|34"
TUNERS|Premium Die Cast, Black Chrome, 17:1
BRIDGE|3-Point
PICKUPS|Epiphone TB Plus HB
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Volume, Volume, Tone
HARDWARE|Black Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS|VS

In terms of sheer rock and roll coolness it's hard to beat the Thunderbird. Put to great use by players such as John Entwistle and Nikki Sixx, who had his own signature Thunderbird in black with Iron Cross inlays, it's a truly Marmite instrument.

Inherently neck-heavy due to its oversized headstock and neck/body proportions, this is a bass that is meant for live play, rather than seated practice sessions. Its twin TB Plus humbuckers give the Thunderbird a thick and satisfyingly grunty tone that's perfect for rock and metal, so grab a pick, sling it low and rock out.If it's good enough for stadium filling bands such as U2 and the Darkness, it's good enough for a set down the local.

CONTACT | www.epiphone.com

OVERWATER ASPIRATION

£385

MANUFACTURER|Tanglewood
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|China
BODY|White Ash
NECK|One piece Maple
NUT WIDTH|40mm
BINDING|N/A
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|24
SCALE LENGTH|34”
TUNERS|Gotoh style mini
BRIDGE|Overwater designed bridge
PICKUPS|Overwater Open pole J J, Passive
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Volume, Pan, Passive tone
HARDWARE|Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS|Gloss Black, Gloss Metallic Wine Red, Gloss Metallic Wine Red

Overwater basses ain't cheap, my friend. Built by British luthier Chris May, Overwater has become synonymous with quality hand-made instruments, but Chris had a long-held desire to offer 'off the peg' instruments that were affordable to a wide variety of players, but were worthy of the Overwater name. Teaming up with Tanglewood, Chris realised that ambition. The Overwater by Tanglewood range features a spread of models and the Aspiration Standard is their entry-level offering. A one-piece maple neck is married to a white ash body, while the passive single coil pickups mean you can get both vintage and modern tones from this sleek number.

CONTACT | www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk
01937 841122

PEAVEY MILLENNIUM BXP 4

£249

MANUFACTURER|Peavey
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|Indonesia
BODY|Basswood w/quilted maple top
NECK|Maple
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|24
SCALE LENGTH|34”
TUNERS|Black Peavey
BRIDGE|String through or top load
PICKUPS|2 passive single coil
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Two volume control, one tone.
HARDWARE|Black

If there's one thing that Peavey knows how to do, it's how to make a super quality bass extremely affordable. The Millennium range always looks great and offers amazing value, coming in four- and five-string versions with active options too, but the entry-level BXP 4 offers staggering value.

A super-slim neck profile makes this a comfortable play, and great for aspiring rock and metal players. Twin Jazz pickups ensure that your basic tones are there, from plummy classic rock to grinding metal, and the range of colour options is attractive too. The BXP 4 is a superb choice for your first bass guitar.

CONTACT | www.peavey.com

SPECTOR PERFORMER 4

£349

MANUFACTURER|Spector
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN|Indonesia
BODY|Basswood
NECK|Rock Maple
NUT WIDTH|38mm
FRETBOARD|Rosewood
FRETS|24 Jumbo
SCALE LENGTH|34”
TUNERS|Spector
BRIDGE|Spector Performer
PICKUPS|Stuart Spector Design (SSD) Performer System – Passive/Dual Coil
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Passive. 2 x Tone / 2 x Vol
HARDWARE|Black Chrome Plated
FINISH OPTIONS|Black Gloss / Metallic Red Gloss

In the 80s you could barely move for the Spector basses adorning the rock stars of the day. Earning a reputation for great design and incredibly versatile tones, Spectors have found favour with musicians across the genre spectrum: you don't get two players more different in style than long-term Spector players Doug Wimbish and Rex Brown.

The Performer opens up Spector to the beginner. Made in Indonesia, the bass comes loaded with two passive Stuart Spector Designed pickups, which are made by EMG. They've been tweaked to give some extra mid-range bark, making the Performer great for rockers who need to cut through the mix.

CONTACT | www.spectorbass.com

SQUIER VINTAGE MODIFIED FRETLESS

£383

MANUFACTURER|Squier
BODY|Agathis
NECK|Maple
NUT WIDTH|38mm
FRETBOARD|Ebonol
FRETS|20, fretless
SCALE LENGTH|34”
TUNERS|Standard open-gear tuners
BRIDGE|Standard four-saddle
PICKUPS|Duncan Designed JB101 Single-Coil Jazz Bass Bridge Pickup and Duncan Designed JB101 Single-Coil Jazz Bass Neck Pickup
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS|Volume 1. (Neck Pickup), Volume 2. (Bridge Pickup), Master Tone
HARDWARE|Chrome

There's something oh-so alluring about the expressive nature of the sounds available, and as Jaco and others have shown, it's not just about long glissandos and "mwah", the fretless can dish out attitude in spades too. However, many fretless basses are on the pricey side, and it's a whole new learning curve even for seasoned players, so making that first step can be daunting.

Squier's Vintage Modified Fretless opens up the fretless world to anyone. Coming in at an affordable price point, and with simply stunning quality for the money, if you've got the itch to try and be the next Pino Palladino then look no further.

CONTACT | www.fender.com/squier

STEINBERGER SPIRIT XT-2

£389

MANUFACTURER | Steinberger
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | Korea
WEIGHT | 3.5kg
BODY | Maple
NECK | Maple
NUT WIDTH | 38mm
FRETBOARD | Rosewood 14" Radius
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
INLAY MATERIAL | Pearloid Dots
BRIDGE | Patented DoubleBall Bridge with 40:1 ratio direct pull tuners
PICKUPS | Steinberger Humbucker, Humbucker
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | Volume, Volume, Tone
HARDWARE | Black Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS | Black

Despite being an unusual-looking instrument, the headless Steinberger basses have graced many a stadium stage over the years. Its snug body size and short overall length due to that missing headstock make this an ideal bass for travel purposes, but the XT-2 can hold its own among its lengthier brethren.

The tone range is wider than you might think for a bass that doesn't actually contain any wood.

It takes a while to get used to the shape and feel of the Steinberger when you're used to big slab-like basses, but it's a solid performer capable of handling a wide variety of musical genres.

CONTACT | www.steinberger.com

TANGLEWOOD REBEL 4

£199

MANUFACTURER | Tanglewood
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | China
WEIGHT | 3.5kg
BODY | Basswood
NECK | Maple
NUT WIDTH | 42mm
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
INLAY MATERIAL | ABS Pearl Dot
TUNERS | Black die-cast
BRIDGE | Black die-cast
PICKUPS | Entwistle PBX and JBX
HARDWARE | Black die-cast
FINISH OPTIONS | Metallic Black, Metallic Red, Metallic Blue, Pearl White (Black model in LH also)

Tanglewood has been around for a long time, and must rank among one of the great success stories of the British guitar world. Their acoustic guitars have developed a formidable reputation, but their basses are often overlooked, which is a shame.

The Rebel is a no-frills workhorse that doesn't try and do anything flashy, but simply offers great value for money at less than £200. If you're taking your first steps into the world of bass, or are looking for a cheap backup or rehearsal bass, the Rebel could be your baby. We're big fans of the tasty finish options as well. The tone range is pretty decent too.

CONTACT | www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk
01937 841122

VINTAGE V4

£339

MANUFACTURER | Vintage
BODY | Eastern Poplar
NECK | Hard Maple – Bolt On
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
FRETS | 20
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
INLAYS | Dots (pearloid on rosewood boards, black on maple)
TUNERS | Wilkinson WJBL200
BRIDGE | Adjustable
PICKUPS | Wilkinson PB x 1 (M) WPB
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS: 1 x Volume, 1 x Tone
HARDWARE | Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS | Right-handed: Sunburst, Boulevard Black, Vintage White (w/rosewood or maple board) – Lefty in Boulevard Black only

Made of eastern poplar, these basses are light and comfortable. The Trevor Wilkinson-designed hardware is tough yet light, adding to the comfort factor of these basses. The Precision-style pickup, also designed by Wilkinson, gives a bit more edge to the traditional Precision bass tones you'd expect. The build quality is superb throughout on these basses, matching instruments twice the price or more, and the line also features the Tony Butler signature model. Available in a variety of colour options, with maple and rosewood fretboard choices, and even a lefty model, the V4 is one of the best budget basses on the market today.

CONTACT | www.jhs.co.uk/vintagebass.html

VINTAGE EST96 ACTIVE

£259

MANUFACTURER | Vintage
BODY | Eastern Poplar
NECK | Maple – Bolt On
BINDING | N/A
FRETBOARD | Maple
FRETS | 21
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
INLAYS | Black Dot
TUNERS | Wilkinson WJBL200
BRIDGE | Adjustable
PICKUPS | Wilkinson Humbucker x 1 (B) and WSM5 – 5 string
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | 3-Band Active EQ Bass 12dB ± 5kHz / Middle 12dB ± 2kHz / Treble 12dB ± 100Hz 1 x Volume
HARDWARE | Chrome
FINISH OPTIONS | 4-string: Sunburst right and left-handed), Black and Natural (righty only). 5-string: Flame Top Brownburst (righty only)

Unless you can afford the £1000-plus asking price Music Man Stingrays remain out of reach for many, especially the beginning player. If you want to cop some of the look and feel of a Stingray but on a budget, then check out the Vintage EST96. Available as a four- and a five-string, both well under the £400 mark, the EST96 has a maple neck and fretboard for a zingy, punchy tone. The Wilkinson hardware and pickup are great quality, and the three-band active EQ gives you great control over your tone. Sure, it's not a Stingray, but for a bit over £300 you get a great quality active bass that gives you the look of Leo Fender's third most famous bass design.

CONTACT | www.jhs.co.uk/vintagebass.html

WARWICK ROCKBASS STREAMER STANDARD 4

£389

MANUFACTURER | Warwick
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | China
WEIGHT | 3.8kg
BODY | Carolena
NECK | Maple neck with Rosewood fingerboard available also as fretless with Tigerstripe Ebony
NUT WIDTH | 38.5mm
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
INLAY MATERIAL | no Inlays
TUNERS | Warwick Tuners
BRIDGE | Warwick two-piece bridge
PICKUPS | 2 passive MEC Vintage Humbuckers
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | passive electronics
HARDWARE | Chrome hardware
FINISH OPTIONS | Available Finishes: Natural satin, oil finish burgundy red, ocean blue, Nirvana black, Honey violin and black high polish

If there's one thing the Germans do incredibly well, it's design and engineering. Warwick has built an enviable reputation as one of the best bass builders in the world, but as with most things, you have to pay a premium for that quality. Recognising that their instruments needed to be within reach of the aspiring player, Warwick launched their RockBass line. Retailing at under £400, the RockBass Streamer Standard is built in China, but to Warwick's exacting specifications, and features Warwick hardware, as well as two passive humbuckers for meaty rock sounds and tonal variety. The Streamer comes in a variety of finishes and is also available as a fretless.

CONTACT | www.warwickbass.com

YAMAHA BB424

£469/566

MANUFACTURER | Yamaha
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | Indonesia
WEIGHT | 6kg
BODY | Solid Alder
NECK | Maple/Rosewood ply
FRETS | 21
SCALE LENGTH | 35"
PICKUPS | P/J Combination SC
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | Vol, tone, toggle switch
HARDWARE | Yamaha chrome
FINISH OPTIONS | Black, tobacco, brown sunburst, vintage white, red metallic

The venerable BB series of basses by Yamaha has been a firm favourite of big name players over the years, played by the likes of Nathan East, Michael Anthony and Lee Sklar to name a few. Thanks to Yamaha's stringent quality standards the affordable BB424 can proudly take its place in the family.

The five-piece maple and nato neck is designed to improve strength and reduce warping. With a neck profile somewhere between a Jazz and a Precision, the BB424 should feel comfortable for most players, while the punchy pickups ensure you can get anything from smooth jazz to out-and-out rock from this beauty.

CONTACT | uk.yamaha.com

WASHBURN AB10

£400

MANUFACTURER | Washburn
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | China
WEIGHT | 2.8kg
BODY | Top: Arched Spruce. Sides/Back – Arched Maple
NECK | Mahogany
NUT WIDTH | 40mm
FRETBOARD | rosewood
FRETS | 21
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
INLAY | dot
TUNERS | Grover exclusive
BRIDGE | rosewood/piezo
PICKUPS | custom piezo
ELECTRONICS/CONTROLS | volume, presence, treble, middle, bass
HARDWARE | chrome

With its sleek profile and Les Paul-style body the AB10 offers something a bit different to the standard acoustic bass guitar. It's the kind of instrument that would have shown up on *MTV Unplugged* back in the day when Bon Jovi and the like were rocking the house. Its proportions make it a comfortable and easy play, and the unplugged sound is surprisingly clear and resonant.

That giant body won't be for everyone, but if it's plangent acoustic tones you're looking for, you can't possibly go wrong. At £400, we've yet to find an acoustic bass that is as playable or as good looking as this.

CONTACT | Sound Technology Tel: 01462 480 000

YOU'LL LOVE THEM

A list of bass retailers we know and trust. There are many other splendid retail sources out there too, so do look around, but if it's friendly advice about basses (budget or otherwise), plus a cup of tea you're after, you could do worse than starting your search for that next bass to add to your collection right here.

BASS DIRECT

www.bassdirect.co.uk
Unit 12, Rigby Close
Heathcote Ind Est
Warwick, CV34 6TH
01926 886433

BASS GEAR

www.bassgear.co.uk
Unit 2
Twyford Business Park
Gas Lane,
Twyford,
Reading,
Berkshire, RG10 9TU
01189 706925

THE BASS GALLERY

www.thebassgallery.com
142 Royal College Street
London NW1 0TA
0207 267 5458

THE BASS CENTRE

www.basscentre.com
1 Mulberry Court
London Road
Bagshot
Surrey GU19 5DT
01276 453 079

MANSONS GUITAR SHOP

www.mansons.co.uk
McCoys Arcade
Fore Street
Exeter, EX4 3AN
01392 496379

MANCHESTER BASS LOUNGE

www.manchesterbasslounge.com
Greenleach Lane
Worsley
Manchester
07837 011 889

IBANEZ

SR1200E PREMIER

IBANEZ HAS A NEW PREMIUM RANGE OF BASSES. MIKE BROOKS FINDS OUT IF 'PREMIUM' MEANS WAITROSE OR ALDI…

Headstock Distribution
www.headstockdistribution.com 0121 508 6666

Constructed in Indonesia, Ibanez's SR1200E Premium takes the brand's ever-popular Soundgear recipe (hence the SR) and gives it a thorough spruce-up. Naturally, its price reflects this, but from the visual side of things, it is fairly clear where the additional dollars are being spent. Although the SR1200E is not the top of the range, a zone reserved for Ibanez's Prestige models, it is apparent that this bass is a definite step up. With fancy timbers, an extensive electronics package and the winning SR bass formula, how can this instrument possibly go wrong?

BUILD QUALITY

The sleek Ibanez Soundgear body now feels even more slimline and organic than before, and the bass looks well constructed, with some very classy visuals. Its warm, natural look works very well with the gold and black hardware combination and the curved body feels well finished and rounded across the whole shape. The natural grain is extremely smooth and the figuring on the ovangkol top is quite something.

The slim body horns add to the comfort of the bass, offering ideal access to the upper frets, and although the SR range is known for lightweight bodyshapes, the positive point is that this bass is an ideal weight and balances very well on and off a strap. The slim, reduced neck profile is a real bonus and the 37mm nut width draws comparisons with a Jazz bass in terms of profile, accessibility and playability. Some players may find the string spacing a little tight around the nut, but it does add to the comfort and playability of the overall package and the neck widens slightly as it reaches the body. The neck is reinforced with tone-resonant titanium to add stiffness and stability and in terms of resonance, despite being a bolt-on design compared to a through-neck, the neck matches the body in its organically rich tone.

> "THE DESIGN, EXECUTION AND RESULTING BASS ARE A WINNING FORMULA"

The neck joint is tight with no discernible gaps, and the set-up is seriously top-notch with no sharp frets in evidence, a really comfortable string action courtesy of fresh Elixir strings and a high degree of overall finishing throughout. The headstock is the customary SR range shape, slimline but effective, and is fitted with gold Gotoh tuners which operate very smoothly. The rosewood fingerboard has been fitted with oval abalone position markers and white side dot markers, while the gold Mono-Rail IV bridge allows action and intonation adjustments to be made. Each saddle can be locked in position for maximum harmonic performance and tone transference. The black plastic controls consist of volume, pickup pan, a three-band EQ, an EQ bypass switch and a mid-toggle switch to select mid frequencies at 250 or 600Hz.

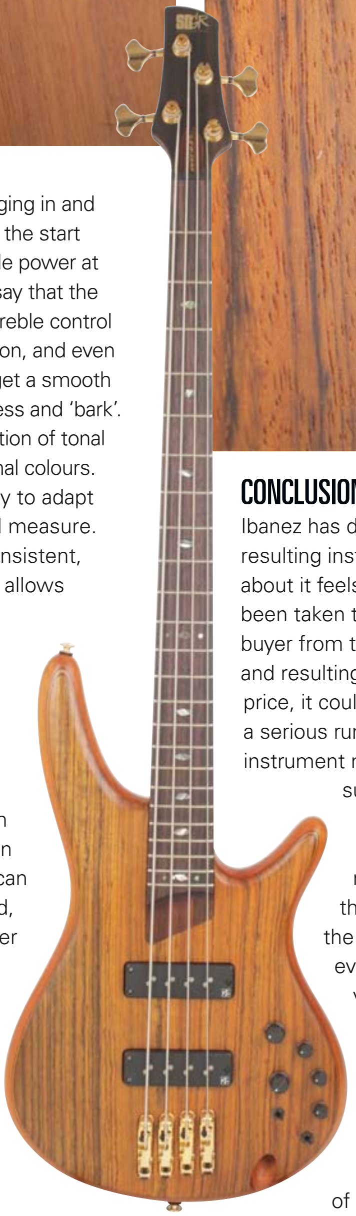
Nordstrand 'Big Single' pickups have been used in a soapbar format, but with the tonal delivery of a powerful single-coil pickup in each position. The control cavity is impressively neat and tidy, being well shielded with all the cables tied back. A nice touch is the very handy penknife-like tool that houses all of the allen keys, screw-drivers and gauges needed to set up the bass.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUNDS

With a strong emphasis on natural woody visuals, it comes as no surprise that the SR1200E has a very strong bright tone, coupled with a throaty mid delivery and it resonates very clearly. No doubt the timbers contribute a great deal to this: you can hear the 'woodiness' of the bass itself. Plugging in and bringing the EQ into play, it is apparent from the start that the electronics package has considerable power at its disposal, and after some use, it is fair to say that the extremes of the EQ are overpowering. The treble control definitely needs to be used with some caution, and even with the power available it is quite tricky to get a smooth tone from this bass without natural throatiness and 'bark'. Having said that, the EQ offers a good selection of tonal light and shade with a variety of different tonal colours.

Sounds aside, the bass is incredibly easy to adapt to, offering playability and comfort in equal measure. Although the bright tonal edge remains consistent, using the EQ bypass softens the tone and allows the player to pan across the pickups. Both units are top notch with the neck pickup being a good deal warmer than its bridge counterpart, but both convey equal volume across all strings: the D and G strings are by no means shrinking violets in the overall signal. The mid-toggle switch is a useful control to have, especially when dealing with a problematic stage or room in a live context where the mid-frequencies can make such a large difference to your sound, although a mid-sweep might be a still better option.

One point worth raising is that although the bridge is certainly up to the task, when it comes to restringing, the units themselves look a little complicated: string changing might not be as quick and easy as you would like, mainly down to the fitting of the string ball.



CONCLUSION

Ibanez has definitely gone to town with this bass: the resulting instrument is a real joy to play. Everything about it feels and looks as though time and care have been taken to produce an instrument that will please the buyer from the day of purchase. The design, execution and resulting bass are a winning formula and at this price, it could definitely give some higher-priced basses a serious run for their money. Players who like a bulkier instrument may comment that this bass doesn't feel substantial enough in their hands, but with playability like this, why complain?

Obviously, the tonal performance is a matter of taste, so we recommend you try this bass before handing over your cash, as the tonal make-up of the SR1200E may not be everyone's cup of tea. If you are after a warm, vintage tone you won't get it with this bass. However, Ibanez have produced a very impressive bass that balances very well, plays remarkably easily and has more than enough tonal options. With the included toolkit and gigbag/gigcase, many a player may be enticed to give this bass a test-drive of their own.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £955
COLOUR | Natural
BODY | Mahogany with ovangkol top
NECK | Five-piece wenge/bubinga laminate
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Nordstrand Big Single soapbar pickups x 2
ELECTRONICS | EQB-IIISC three-band active EQ
CONTROLS | Volume, pickup pan, three-band EQ (bass, middle, treble), EQ bypass switch, mid-boost switch (250Hz or 600 Hz)
TUNERS | Gotoh
BRIDGE | Mono-Rail IV
MADE IN | Indonesia
NUT WIDTH | 37mm
NECK JOIN | Bolt on, four screw attachment
SCALE LENGTH | 34" (864mm)
FRETS | 24
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | Gigbag case, rectangular
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | At under £1000, this bass has a lot to offer for the asking price. Well designed and put together with great playability and a lot of tonal options to experiment with
MINUS | The EQ extremes are just that, extreme. Some players might prefer a bass with larger dimensions and greater weight
OVERALL | A very impressive bass in every respect that will catch the eye of many players

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	9/10 stars
SOUND QUALITY	8/10 stars
VALUE	8/10 stars

Ibanez
BASS WORKSHOP
LIMITED EDITION
HEADSTOCK DISTRIBUTION
EMPOWERING MUSIC
www.headstockdistribution.com
Get Connected :
Ibanez Guitars
@ibanezofficial
ibanez.com
Ibanez

GORDON-SMITH GRYPHON

JOEL GRAHAM GETS HIS HANDS ON THE LONG-AWAITED GRYPHON

Manchester Bass Lounge
www.manchesterbasslounge.com

The renowned luthiers at Gordon-Smith have not been making bass guitars for several years now. After some convincing from the Manchester Bass Lounge, however, G-S has started production again. And with a few prototype models out of the way, the manufacturer and store have worked together to develop the first production Gryphon four-string.

With modern looks that still retain more than a hint of retro, the Gryphon's overall shape looks as if it is based on some kind of medieval beheading tool. But there is clearly much more than design alone to lose your head over here...

BUILD QUALITY

The body design of the bass is glorious, with an elongated top horn and a headstock that looks like it should be held in one hand and carried like the aforementioned ancient weapon. However, there is such a modern edge to the Gryphon that I can't help but picture the scenario of an old Burns Bison being placed in some kind of teleportation device (you've seen *The Fly*, right?) along with some modern circuitry and some sparkly paint. The Gryphon would be the super-bass that emerged from the transformation.

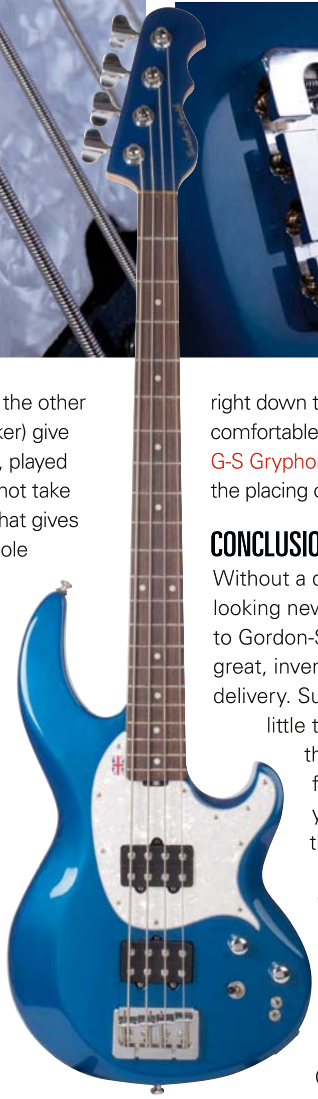
> "WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE GRYPHON IS ONE OF THE BEST-LOOKING NEWER BASSES OUT THERE: ITS DESIGN IS A CREDIT TO GORDON-SMITH AND MANCHESTER BASS LOUNGE"

The body is heavily contoured at front and back, sitting snugly into you when playing seated. The finish is of a quality that only handmade basses seem to carry, with its sophisticated Lake Placid Blue coat over the poplar body. The pearloid scratchplate also gives the body a touch of class. Two handwound Gordon-Smith humbuckers sit dominantly, while further down the body there's a solid polished chrome Gotoh Hipshot bridge. The body is completed with an abundance of matching chrome controls, including a three-way pickup selector, volume control with pull boost, tone control and two coil-tapping switches for the bridge and neck pickups.

The neck is one-piece bolt-on maple, with 21 'hard Dutch' frets on a rosewood fingerboard, with dot-style fret markers. At the top sits that glorious vintage-looking headstock, with chunky chrome Schaller tuners. A finely fitted brass nut separates the neck from the headstock.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

With its multitude of controls, the Gryphon offers a plethora of tonal options. Three switches control the pickups, one



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £995
BODY | Poplar
NECK | Maple
FRETBOARD | Rosewood
COLOUR | Lake Placid Blue
FRETS | 21
PICKUPS | Two G-S Gryphon humbuckers
CONTROLS | Three-way pickup selector, volume and tone with pull boost
BRIDGE | Gotoh Hipshot
TUNERS | Schaller
HARDWARE | Chrome

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Top-notch construction and tone range
MINUS | You'll need time to get to know this mythical beast
OVERALL | Buy with confidence

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★★★★★★

selecting either unit in traditional fashion, while the other two three-way switches (one for each humbucker) give different coil-tapping options. The bridge pickup, played alone, roars with a rounded punchy tone. Let's not take anything away from the neck pickup either, as that gives out a lovely classic Precision-style tone. The whole variety of tones that the bass can omit covers pretty much all styles, even via an amp with a flat EQ. However, the pull boost doesn't do a great deal when selected. It's noticeable, but doesn't create enough difference in output volume to warrant it being used as a boost – you'll still need an additional pedal for that.

The smooth contoured neck feels slightly wider than that of a P-Bass at first. After a few moments, however, it feels easy to work with. Access to the higher frets is bliss, helped by the shape of the lower short horn. The elongated upper horn is more than just eye-candy, too: when using a strap, it enables the bass to balance to perfection.

Using fingers or a pick on this bass causes no issues in either style. There is plenty of right-hand space between the base of the neck, right down to the bridge. Anywhere on this body feels really comfortable, although slap isn't really the ideal style on the G-S Gryphon, as the strings sit close to the body and due to the placing of the pickups, space is a little tight.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the Gryphon is one of the best-looking newer basses out there: its design is a credit to Gordon-Smith and MBL. It is completed by some great, inventive touches, from its playability to its tone delivery. Sure, elements of the Gryphon will require a little time before you become totally at ease with them. The amount of switching required to find your tone may take a little longer than you are used to, but you'll find it eventually – that's guaranteed.

Most importantly, less than a grand for a totally handmade bass of this quality is truly outstanding. With its beautiful build quality and those fantastic tones, mixed with its ease of playability, the fact that you won't need to break the bank fills this particular Yorkshireman with glee… even if the Gryphon is made in Lancashire. ■

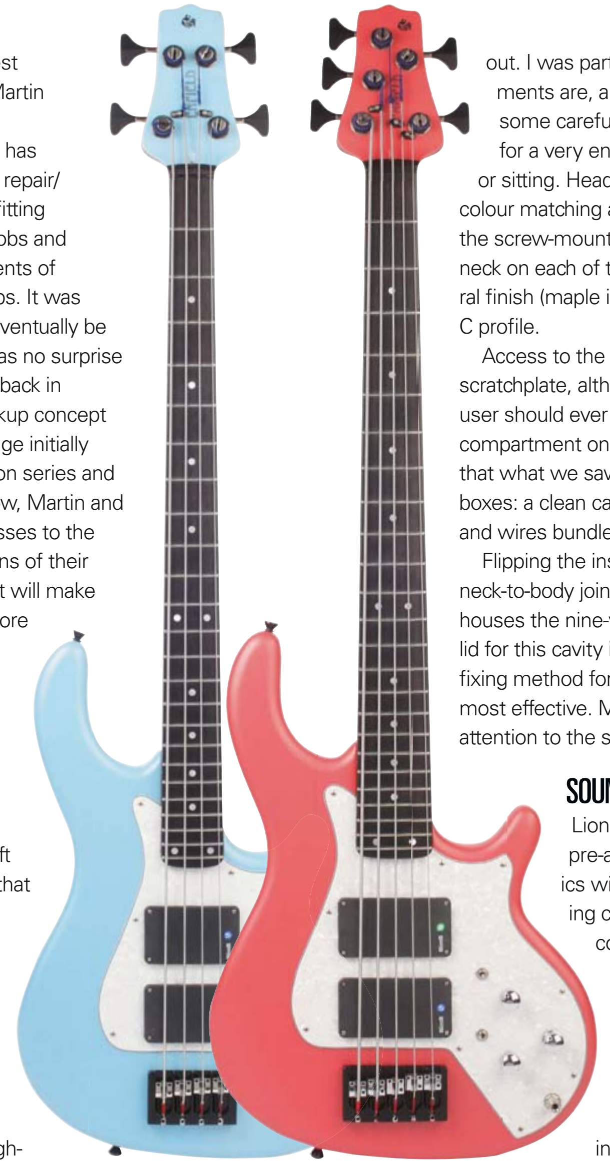
ENFIELD LIONHEART

FOUR AND FIVE-STRING

STUART CLAYTON HEADS OFF ON A BOLD CRUSADE WITH TWO MIGHTY LIONHEARTS

Enfield Guitars
01233 822522 ● www.enfieldguitars.com

The Enfield Lionheart basses are the latest instruments from the holding pens of Martin Sims and his team at the Sims Custom Shop, based in Kent. Since 1994 Martin has built an enviable reputation in the guitar repair/customisation business, firstly for retrofitting fretboard LEDs, then for custom paint jobs and modifications, all of which have seen the instruments of the world's top players pass through his workshops. It was inevitable that such extensive experience would eventually be channelled into their own instruments and so it was no surprise when the Enfield range of basses were launched back in 2009. Centred around the unique Super Quad pickup concept developed by Martin and his team, the Enfield range initially comprised the high-end exotic wood-based Cannon series and the more conventional-looking Avenger series. Now, Martin and his team have added the Lionheart and Fusion basses to the range, both of which are simplified, refined versions of their predecessors and which arrive at a price point that will make the unique pickup options pioneered by Enfield more affordable to the average bassist.



BUILD QUALITY

The Lionheart basses look fantastic. Our review instruments sported an American red alder body finished with a cool retro colour, Daphne Pearl for the four-string and Fiesta Pearl for the five. As the name suggests, the finish used here has a soft pearlescence to it, lending the body a soft sheen that makes it very tactile indeed. The pearloid scratchplates are the perfect visual accompaniment to this, as are the ebony fingerboards. A mixture of black and chrome Hipshot hardware is used throughout each instrument: the controls are chrome, while the heavy-duty bridge and tuners are a black and chrome combination that looks very effective. The body shaping of each bass is Fender-esque, with comfortable contouring throughout. I was particularly struck by how lightweight these instruments are, a pleasant surprise which, when combined with some carefully considered strap button placement, makes for a very enjoyable playing experience whether standing or sitting. Headstock shaping was simple but effective, with colour matching available as an optional upgrade. I also liked the screw-mounted string guides for the A and D strings. The neck on each of these instruments was mahogany with a natural finish (maple is also an option) and shaped to a comfortable C profile.

Access to the main control cavity requires removing the scratchplate, although this is not something that the typical user should ever need to do thanks to the separate battery compartment on the rear of the instrument. Rest assured that what we saw beneath the scratchplate ticked all the right boxes: a clean cavity with no excess sawdust, neat soldering and wires bundled in small looms where possible.

Flipping the instrument over, we found a five-bolt, plateless neck-to-body join. There's also a small triangular cavity, which houses the nine-volt battery required for the active preamp. The lid for this cavity is held in place with magnets, an underused fixing method for control cavities that is nevertheless one of the most effective. Martin and his team had obviously paid close attention to the set-up.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

Lionheart basses are fitted with a Glockenlang pre-amp (which is installed by renowned electronics wiz John East, who also designed the switching circuit boards) and have a simple control set comprising a master volume (also a push/pull active/passive control), pan control and a stacked two-band EQ – bass and treble. Throughout the testing period I centred the pan and EQ controls. I would personally like to see a three-band EQ here, but presumably this is one of the features that has been lost in the process of bringing the bass to market at

SimS
SimS
SimS
SimS

this price point. Where things get interesting, though, is the pickup options: all Enfield basses come fitted with the company's groundbreaking Super Quad pickups, each of which comprises four separate coils. The beauty of the Super Quad system is that these coils can be split horizontally as well as vertically, enabling the player to switch between split coils, single coils and parallel hum-cancelling options. These options are activated by three-way toggle switches below the pickups and the active setting is indicated by a tri-colour LED mounted within the pickup casing itself. In the downward position the coils are split: as you look down at the pickup the bottom left and top right coils are activated (think P-Bass pickup). The split coil option is indicated with a red LED and the resulting

> **THERE'S NO DENYING IT: I'M IMPRESSED, AND I WANT ONE. MAYBE TWO**

tone is what you would expect from a typical P-Bass pickup configuration, albeit a rather lively one. In centre position the LED is green, indicating the single coil option – this is the two left coils. The resulting tone is again as you would expect: a typical single coil J-Bass tone. The final position is up (indicated with a blue LED) and this activates all four of the coils in the pickup, resulting in a parallel hum-cancelling setting and yielding a Music Man-like tone.

The result of all of these configurations is that you effectively have several basses in one: you have standard P-Bass and J-Bass options, a combination of the two and the humbucking option as well as combinations of all three – a total of nine different combinations with the pan pot centred. Switching between them is as simple as flicking a switch and importantly, the output level remains consistent whichever option you use.

I started my experimentations with each pickup set to the single coil option. The resulting tone was obviously comparable to an active Jazz bass. Through the Aguilar rig that I have in my studio, the resulting tone was immense: powerful, rich, deep and rounded, but with the clarity that you need to be able to articulate intricate lines effectively. Slap and fingerstyle grooves sounded fantastic with this basic setting, as did picked rock. Set to a split coil setting on each pickup, the tone sent me off into Billy Sheehan territory – that of a souped-up P-Bass. This very usable setting worked well in a rock context, unsurprisingly, but also for more subtle palm-muted grooves as well. I used the bass in this mode during a recent session and loved the recorded tone that I got.

Switching both pickups to humbucking mode resulted in a slap tone that packed a punch and had plenty of upper-range zing. With each of these settings, the word I kept coming back to as I played was 'clarity', which is a good indication of where these instruments excel: the range of tones is impressive, but it's also easy to hear all the details in your playing that are sometimes lost. Martin and his team have not only built a seriously impressive instrument here, but they've made a welcome effort to put the focus back onto good old British workmanship. To that end, they've used British components wherever possible: the pickup casings, bobbins and circuit boards are all manufactured, assembled and wound in the UK. Glockenlang and Hipshot components might not be British, but all assembly is carried out at Martin's workshops in Kent.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

BODY | Wood Red American alder or swamp ash
BRIDGE | Hipshot
FRETS | 24
NECK | Wood Mahogany or maple
FINGERBOARD | Indian rosewood or Indian ebony
NECK | Finish Natural
TUNING MACHINES | Hipshot
NECK | Attachment 5 bolt
CONTROLS | Two-band active preamp; vol (with push/pull active/passive switching), treble, bass
PRE-AMP | Glockenlang
PICKUPS | Enfield Super Quad system

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | An innovative range of instruments that offer unparalleled versatility
MINUS | None
OVERALL | Great instruments, recommended for a test drive

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	10/10
SOUND QUALITY	10/10
VALUE	9/10

CONCLUSION

There's no denying it: I'm impressed, and I want one. Maybe two. Each of the Lionheart basses was beautifully built, well-balanced and a genuine pleasure to play. The Super Quad pickup system is innovative, versatile and ultimately extremely usable: it's often the case that a particular instrument excels at one particular tone, but that's not the case here, as there are a lot of usable tones on offer. There's undoubtedly a wider appeal with these more conventional looking instruments as well: as impressive as the Super Quad system is, it can look a little oppressive when the entire system is built into one pickup casing (as on the Cannon range) and that look isn't for everyone. Martin and his team have bypassed this aesthetic quirk by offering the system in a more conventional looking package, and I think they're on to a winner.

Although at this price point the Lionheart basses remain a serious consideration for anyone, it's nevertheless good news that the Super Quad system is now a realistic option for most people.

Music Man

MUSIC MAN
CLASSIC SABRE

STUART CLAYTON RATTLES HIS SABRE. BUT IS THIS A FULL-BLOWN BASS ATTACK OR JUST A SHOT ACROSS THE BOWS?

Strings and Things
www.stringsandthings.com

For the majority of the low-end community, Music Man basses need no introduction. With their distinctive appearance and equally distinctive tones, many of us have either owned or lusted after a Music Man, be it a Stingray, a Bongo, or a Sabre. Little wonder then that the company has attracted a wealth of top-name endorsees over the last three decades – Flea, Tony Levin, Nick Beggs and John Myung are all part of the family.

The Sabre Classic – one of the company's late 2012 offerings – is for many Music Man aficionados a welcome return for one of their lesser-known models. Originally released back in late 1978, the Sabre was never able to match the wide-scale popularity of the Music Man Stingray, despite offering an additional pickup and an expanded tonal palette. The Sabre was modified slightly throughout the 80s (notably, the original three toggle controls were swapped for a slide switch in 1983) then quietly discontinued in 1991. The reappearance of the Sabre in late 2012 marked the first new models in over 20 years.

BUILD QUALITY

Straight out of the Music Man hardshell case, the US-built Sabre Classic is undeniably a gorgeous looking instrument: the neck and fingerboard of our test instrument were constructed of highly figured birdseye maple, with both pieces clearly having started life as the same section of wood. Following the installation of the truss rod, they've been carefully recombined here, appearing once again as a single piece. Set against the black logo decals and dot markers and combined with the chrome hardware, the effect is stunning.

Our test bass featured a black lacquered ash body with a top-loading chrome-plated hardened steel bridge, complete with mute pads. There are two pickups: a 16-pole humbucker in neck position and an eight-pole humbucker at the bridge. Both use Alnico magnets and in contrast to the original Sabre, have solid covers, denying the bass one of the classic Music Man visual cues – the large, exposed pole pieces.

Unscrewing the front control plate, we gained access to the electronics cavity and were greeted by an impeccably clean compartment and neat soldering. All of the wiring was well-organised and rubber shrinkwrap had been used to keep things tidy. All of the controls were well-seated and felt impressively substantial. Access to the 9V battery was via a screwed-in chrome panel on the rear of the instrument.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

In use the bass certainly feels substantial: it's a little on the heavy side, weighing in at over 10lbs, although its balance when seated was excellent, with no neck dive evident during our testing. Balance was equally good while standing. The 21-fret neck has a thick C profile, adding to its overall sense of chunkiness, but the high gloss finish made it quick and easy to get around. Edge contouring (the original Sabre was the first Music Man bass to feature this) was ample in all the right places, making extended periods of playing – and

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

BODY WOOD | Ash
BODY FINISH | Standard Classic Collection colours
BRIDGE | Music Man top-loading chrome-plated, hardened steel bridge plate with 'Classic' stainless steel saddles and adjustable mute pads
FRETS | 21, high-profile, wide
NECK WOOD | Choice of birdseye or flame maple
FINGERBOARD | Maple or rosewood
NECK FINISH | High-gloss polyester
NECK COLOURS | Natural aged yellow finish
TUNING MACHINES | Schaller BM, with tapered string posts
TRUSS ROD | Adjustable, no component or string removal
NECK JOIN | Six bolts
CONTROLS | Two-band active preamp; volume, treble, bass
SWITCHING | Five-way lever pickup selector
PICKUPS | Standard: (neck) 16-pole humbucker, (bridge) 8-pole humbucker, both with Alnico magnets and solid black covers. PatentedMusic Man 'Silent Circuit'

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A cracking instrument. Great tones, looks cool. Don't want to give it back
MINUS | A little on the heavy side
OVERALL | A lovely bass, well worth a look

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	10/10 stars
SOUND QUALITY	10/10 stars
VALUE	7/10 stars

there were many – very comfortable.

The Sabre Classic has an active two-band preamp and sports a slightly simpler control set when compared to the original model. Whereas the first version had three toggle switches mounted above each control (for pickup selection, phase and bright boost) the newer model features the slide selector switch that was found on the later models of the original bass. This selector has five positions: in position one (closest to the bridge) coils one and two (found on the bridge pickup) are used, meaning that only the bridge pickup is used. In the second position, coils one, two and three are used – coil three is found on the neck pickup. In the third position all four coils are used, in the fourth only coil three is used and in the final position coils three and four are used (this is obviously the same as only using the neck pickup). The three rotary controls are master volume, treble and bass. The bass is fitted with Music Man's patented Silent Circuit, which 'reduces hum and retains true single-coil sound'.

Plugging in, my first observation was that all five of the pickup selections yield noticeably different tones, all while retaining the classic Music Man 'glug'. In position one (bridge pickup only) the tone is as one would expect: punchy, with some suitably honky-sounding upper mids – it's a lively tone that's perfectly suited to fingerstyle funk grooves and is great if you're looking for a tone that will cut through an unfriendly mix. In position two, the third coil is added, resulting in a little more grunt that thickens up an already decent fingerstyle tone. Position three yielded a good all-round tone that would work well in most situations – I found that this position served as my starting point every time I used the bass, as it worked well for fingerstyle, slap and picked lines. Moving to position four, the result is a very woody front pickup tone that uses only the third coil. This made for an excellent old-school slap tone that offered a solid low end combined with a pleasing upper midrange punch. The final position (neck pickup only) thickened up the tone from the previous position, adding in more low-end – again, very usable. Further adjustments to each of these positions using the basic treble and bass controls meant that I was able to further refine my preferred tones.

The string mutes mounted at the bridge were also very effective. These can be raised or lowered by turning the screws mounted in front of each and, as it's possible to adjust each one individually, you can fine-tune the muting so that each string is dampened to the same degree. As a bassist who often places foam or cloth under the strings for a dampened Carol Kaye-like tone, I found these particularly useful and couldn't help wishing I had them on my regular basses. Fingerstyle Jamerson-style grooves worked a treat with the mutes engaged, as did vintage picking lines.

CONCLUSION

It's probably obvious that the Sabre Classic has made a very positive impact on me. It's an excellent instrument in every way: it looks great, it plays like a dream and it's versatile. The tone is distinctive however you use it, but with tones like these, that's no bad thing. At £2030 RRP this won't be an easy purchase for anyone, especially considering that vintage models can often be found on the second-hand market for a similar price or less. That being said, we're sure that there are many Music Man fans who will be delighted to see the return of the Sabre.

CARVIN

ICON 5

NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER, GOES THE SAYING, BUT IS THIS TASTY-LOOKING NUMBER FROM ACROSS THE POND AS 'ICONIC' AS ITS NAME SUGGESTS? MIKE BROOKS TAKES A CLOSER LOOK

Bass Gear
www.bassgear.co.uk

The Carvin name has been around for what feels like an age, yet for some reason, their basses have never made the splash here in the UK that their design and construction have promised. Whether this is down to the instruments themselves or their distribution/reseller channels is open to debate, but this particular bass from the Icon range certainly caught our eye on its arrival. At just over the £2,000 mark, it's no budget offering, so it needs to justify its price tag.

BUILD QUALITY

The elongated top body horn stands out, but it's the impressive spalted maple veneer adorning the alder body that's going to grab the headlines here, particularly with the glossy cherry sunset burst finish, which has also been applied to the headstock. The timber figuring shows off the colouring to the max and this, matched with the gold hardware, gives this bass a very classy look indeed.

The curvaceous body shape works well without being controversial, with contouring in all the right places at front and back, to make the playing experience as comfortable as possible. The cutaways give good access to the strings, although the placement of the top horn and positioning in relation to the neck restricts access to the upper frets on the lower strings somewhat. However, it's not a major issue.

The birdseye maple fingerboard and maple through-neck feature equally impressive figuring, the darker warm hue of the fingerboard fitting in well with the overall character of the instrument. The neck is finished with a satin coat, unlike the gloss coat applied to the body and headstock, and has been applied extremely well and sanded for optimum smoothness. The body colouring starts at the point where the neck and body meet, which looks a little odd at first, but it works nonetheless. The fingerboard has a slight camber and features mother-of-pearl block inlays on the front face and black dot position markers along the side of the neck.

The fretwork is impeccable and well finished without any noticeable faults, and the rolled fingerboard edges guarantee a comfortable neck as the profile is a perfect mix of slim depth and broad fingerboard, without being extreme in either respect. As a five-string, it's a highly playable machine, the 16.5mm string spacing working very well with the instrument's physical dimensions. The Carvin moniker adorns the sleekly

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £2183
COLOUR | Dark cherry sunset burst
BODY | Alder with spalted maple top
NECK | Maple
FINGERBOARD | Birdseye maple
PICKUPS | Carvin SP2 soapbar pickups x 2
ELECTRONICS | 18-volt active/passive, 3-band EQ
CONTROLS | Volume (push/pull EQ bypass), pickup pan, bass/treble boost/cut(stacked), mid-range frequency and boost/cut (stacked)
TUNERS | Carvin premium tuners, Schaller-style
BRIDGE | Hipshot A-style, two-way adjustable, through-bridge and through-body stringing
MADE IN | USA
NUT WIDTH | 44mm
NECK JOIN | Through neck
SCALE LENGTH | 34-inch (864mm)
FRETS | 24
WEIGHT | 4.21kg (9lbs 5oz)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | Hard case
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A great looking and sounding bass that has a lot to offer. Very playable, comfortable and versatile. We can't see any player being disappointed with their purchase
MINUS | Some five-string players might want to extend that scale length to 35 inches, which is possible as a custom order
OVERALL | Everything a bass at this price should be: flexible, desirable and generally top-notch

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

"IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF ITS ASSETS, THE PLAYER REALLY NEEDS TO USE EACH CONTROL AND UNDERSTAND HOW THAT CONTROL WORKS IN RELATION TO THE OTHERS"

shaped headstock in a striking gold finish that complements the overall colouring, while the graphite nut and truss rod cover (providing truss rod access from the nut-end of the neck) fit in with the black Carvin machine heads, which operate smoothly.

With the 18-volt circuit powering a three-band EQ with mid-sweep and an EQ bypass option, Carvin has made good use of the control layout and space available, without cluttering the body with controls. The bridge looks like a substantial unit, offering both through-bridge and through-body stringing. Turning the bass over shows off two flip-top battery cavities for easy battery changes, and a quick peek inside the control cavity shows it to be well-shielded with plenty of copper foil, well laid out and neat cabling throughout.

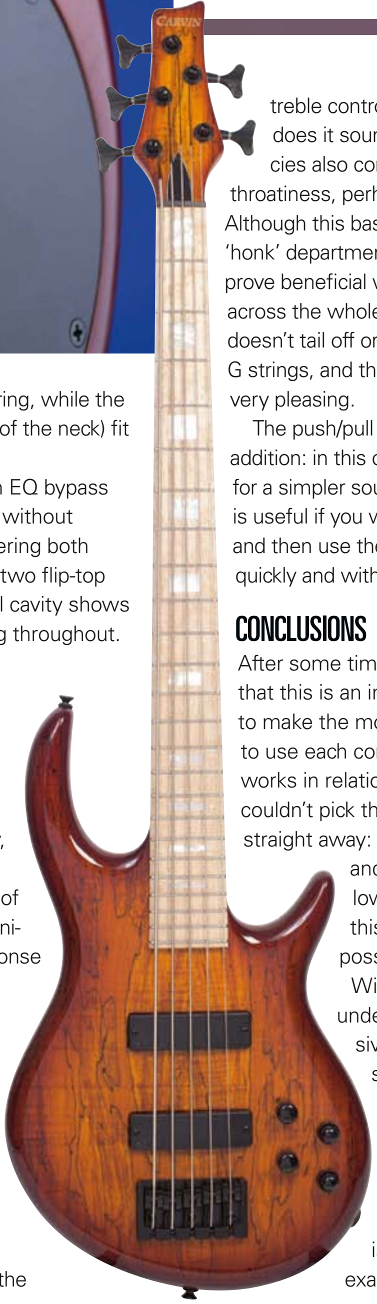
PLAYABILITY AND SOUNDS

Despite the 34-inch scale, as opposed to a 35-inch scale that some manufacturers prefer for their five-string basses, the Icon balances pretty well on and off a strap, although it does have a tendency to want to sit horizontally across the player's body. It's not a major issue, but it does mean that the player has to hold the bass in position occasionally. That said, the bass is a delight to play, the action is very comfortable and the set-up is excellent.

First impressions are that it is a very clean-sounding bass with a great deal of articulation in the tone. This may be too clinical for some players, but after an initial period of getting used to the bass, the way in which the EQ works in response to each adjustable setting becomes apparent. The mid-controls offer considerable scope to add some rasp and guts to your tone, while the pickup pan control is a delicate beast where a small adjustment has a marked effect on your sound. Panning between both pickups highlights a considerable range of tones from just the pickups alone, from rounded bottom-end thump, to a good mix of both pickups in the detented position, across to a brighter, snappier tone from the bridge pickup. Although the bass doesn't instantly come across as a killer tone machine, there is a lot going on, so some time spent with the controls figuring it all out will be time well spent.

The slap tone cuts through very nicely and is very prominent: percussive thumping and popping really stands out, with a particularly transparent bite if the treble control is liberally applied – although at no point does it sound harsh or extreme. The lower frequencies also come through very well with a mid-focused throatiness, perhaps due to the construction methods. Although this bass doesn't really have much to offer in the 'honk' department, it does have power and definition which prove beneficial when applied to the low B-string. The tone across the whole bass has a solid foundation that thankfully doesn't tail off or disappear as you move up to the D and G strings, and the level of sustain across the whole neck is very pleasing.

The push/pull facility on the volume pot is always a handy addition: in this case, it simply bypasses the three-band EQ for a simpler sound with a marginal volume increase, which is useful if you want to set up two distinct sounds on a gig and then use the volume control to switch between them quickly and with minimal fuss.



CONCLUSIONS

After some time spent playing this bass, it became clear that this is an instrument with a lot to offer – but in order to make the most of its assets, the player really needs to use each control and understand how that control works in relation to the others. That's not to say that you couldn't pick the bass up and coax a great tone from it straight away: without a doubt you can, but the circuit and pickups have a lot to offer. Throwing the low B into the equation as well means that this is a bass with a lot of tonal options and possibilities on tap.

With all this on offer, its price point is understandable: you're getting an impressive instrument for your money. Whether it stands head and shoulders above similar instruments at this sort of price is debatable, and whether the Carvin name is enough to draw players towards the Icon needs to be seen. Visually, it's a class act, and in terms of comfort and playability, it is certainly up there with similar five-string examples in this price bracket.

STATUS

KINGBASS PARAMATRIX

AFTER 30 YEARS, STATUS GRAPHITE RECKONS IT'S DEVELOPED THE PERFECT SIGNATURE BASS FOR MARK KING. JOEL MCIVER DOES 100 ONE-THUMB PRESS-UPS, READY TO TAKE IT ON . . .

Status Graphite
www.status-graphite.com ● Thanks to Eugene for the loan of this bass

Mark King of Level 42 is to slap bass what Marks & Spencer is to ready meals, or what Birds Eye is to fishfingers – in other words, the ultimate exponent of the style. It might be a bit grander to say that he is to slap what Ferrari is to supercars, or Hollywood is to movies, but that would be pointless, ignoring the fact that there is something very British about King's playing and songwriting. King is without a doubt the finest slap player ever to emerge from this sceptr'd isle. His nearest American equivalent would be Les Claypool of Primus, whose style and sound is markedly different, and who emerged into the public eye only a few years after Level 42. But compare the two: King's slapping is razor-sharp and precision-engineered; Claypool's is raw and complex. The former sounds like a Brit; the latter an American. We make this point simply because it leads us to appreciate more finely the qualities of the Status Kingbass, King's weapon of choice for many years, which has landed in our laps in its latest incarnation, the Paramatrix. It's a slinky, eminently playable, very expensive instrument that's as British as Stilton. Let's have at it!

BUILD QUALITY

Status Graphite has built a formidable reputation based on the quality and endurance of its bass bodies, among other things. The secret of their construction is in the name – graphite is their chosen material. While King also has a graphite Paramatrix, the model we've been sent for review has a combination of movingui and mahogany woods in its body, though its neck is indeed graphite. The top finish is a beautifully textured cherry sunburst, with a raft of gold and black hardware that'll have your fingers itching to get tweaking as soon as you see it.

"PLAYABLE, TONALLY VERSATILE AND A VERITABLE WORK OF ART"

The basic Paramatrix (although 'basic' feels like an inappropriate word, given the top-level spec) comes in at £2,895, which is £1,100 less than this particular review bass, souped-up as it is to King's exact requirements. This one – a fiver under four grand – has a King-friendly string spacing of 16.5mm, a Bendwell (which we'll come to in a minute) and a set of LEDs running up the front and upper edge of the neck. It's a bit like buying a Mercedes and shelling out extra for a sunroof and air-conditioning. These things aren't mandatory, but they look and feel great.

There is literally nothing negative to say about the build quality of the Paramatrix. In case you were wondering if we're saying that because Status are advertisers in *BGM*, or because they've offered us a discount on their next bass design, you can rest easy. This bass is genuinely flawless. That doesn't mean that it's suitable for all bass players: far from it. We simply mean that this is a precision-manufactured guitar. Every fret-end is sleekly buffed, every component, from the giant, regal-looking slab of gold that is the bridge, to the smoothly-detented controls, does exactly what it is supposed to, with perfect ease of operation. This bass costs four thousand quid for good reason.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

The Paramatrix will not be the right bass for most people reading this magazine, despite its undeniable quality. Sure, Mark King doesn't only play slap bass; he is a master of many techniques. However, the ace of spades in his pack is undoubtedly the slap style for which he is famous. Bass held at armpit level, forearm damping the strings, and gaffa-taped thumb whirring furiously, the man himself cannot be equalled when it comes to the art of high-speed funk, and his signature bass is tailored perfectly to that style. It is not an all-rounder's bass. There are entire genres of music for which it would be wholly inappropriate. What the Paramatrix does, with great efficiency and power, is sit high on its player's

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £2895 plus extra £1100 for Bendwell, 16.5mm string spacing and LEDs
MADE IN | UK
BODY | Figured movingui facing, mahogany back, cherry/amber sunburst finish
NECK | Graphite, two-way truss rod
FINGERBOARD | Graphite
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 32"
MACHINE HEADS | Status
BRIDGE | Status
PICKUPS | Two Status Bi-Max, hum-cancelling, four coils each
CONTROLS | Master volume, pickup balance, treble and bass cut/boost, low parametric control (85-850 Hz), high parametric control (1.5-12 KHz), each with extra centring control
HARD CASE | Included

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Build and tone are both as flawless as a bass can be. We're still gobsmacked
MINUS | This is a quirky, eccentric instrument despite its brilliance: its personality may not be for everyone
OVERALL | The Paramatrix Kingbass is exquisitely built to do a particular job very well indeed. If that's your job too, don't hesitate to invest

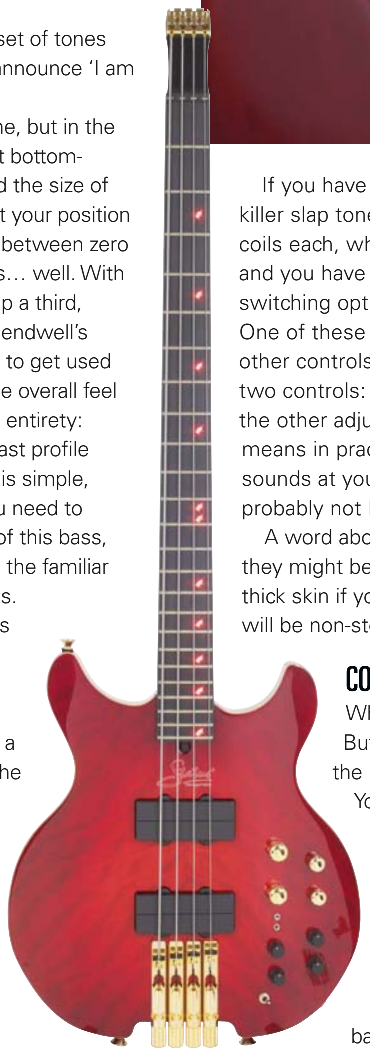
BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

body with perfect balance, deliver a raging set of tones and – via its eyeball-searing LED system – announce 'I am Mark King's bass!'

The overall weight of the Paramatrix is fine, but in the seated position the body feels the tiniest bit bottom-heavy thanks to the lack of a headstock, and the size of the bridge and tuners. No matter, just adjust your position slightly. Then there's the Bendwell, a space between zero fret and nut where you can bend the strings… well. With a bit of zeal and strong fingers you can go up a third, although a semitone or tone is where the Bendwell's limit feels happiest. This takes no time at all to get used to. If you're happy with headless basses, the overall feel is very friendly, as is the graphite neck in its entirety: the surface is slick but not slippery, with a fast profile that doesn't lack a feeling of solidity. Tuning is simple, too, once you've got used to which way you need to turn the tuners. In order to make the most of this bass, you'll have to unlearn what you know about the familiar broccoli machine heads from headed basses.

For us, the elephant in the room, insofar as there is one, is the Paramatrix EQ system. Approaching this produces the same feeling that rookie engineers get, when they move from a four-track home recorder that fits into a carrier bag to a 96-track Pro-Tools rig that is the size of an aircraft hangar. It's a wonderfully designed and produced system, but its complexity is a little intimidating. Mark King requires a particular range of bright tones for his slap and fingerstyle playing, and the EQ here is designed to facilitate that – but for the rest of us, even half the options available would be enough for the average gig. So be warned.



If you have more courage than we do, or indeed more urgent requirements for a killer slap tone, dive right in without hesitation. The two Bi-Max pickups have four coils each, which permits two single-coil options and a twin-coil option. Mix them up and you have no fewer than nine coil possibilities, all hum-free. The three-way coil switching option is new to the Paramatrix, as are the ingenious parametric controls. One of these is set to control high frequencies between 1.5 KHz and 12 KHz. The other controls low frequencies from 85 Hz up to 850 Hz. Each parametric circuit has two controls: one of them allows the player to set the exact centre of the frequency, the other adjusts the amount of cut or boost at that frequency. Got all that? What this means in practice is that you have a hell of a lot of tone options and a wide range of sounds at your fingertips. Do you need all that? Mark King does, but you, amigo, are probably not Mark King.

A word about the LEDs on the fingerboard. We love them, although we'd feared that they might be a bit off-putting. They're not even remotely so, but you'll need to have thick skin if you use them: the jeers of 'show-off!' from your band-mates and audience will be non-stop.

CONCLUSION

What a bass this is, eh? Playable, tonally versatile and a veritable work of art. But who is it for? Would you play it down by your knees in a punk band, or use the Bendwell in a jazz trio, or switch on those lights during a studio session? You could if you wanted to: remember, rules are just mind control and, after all, this is rock'n'roll.

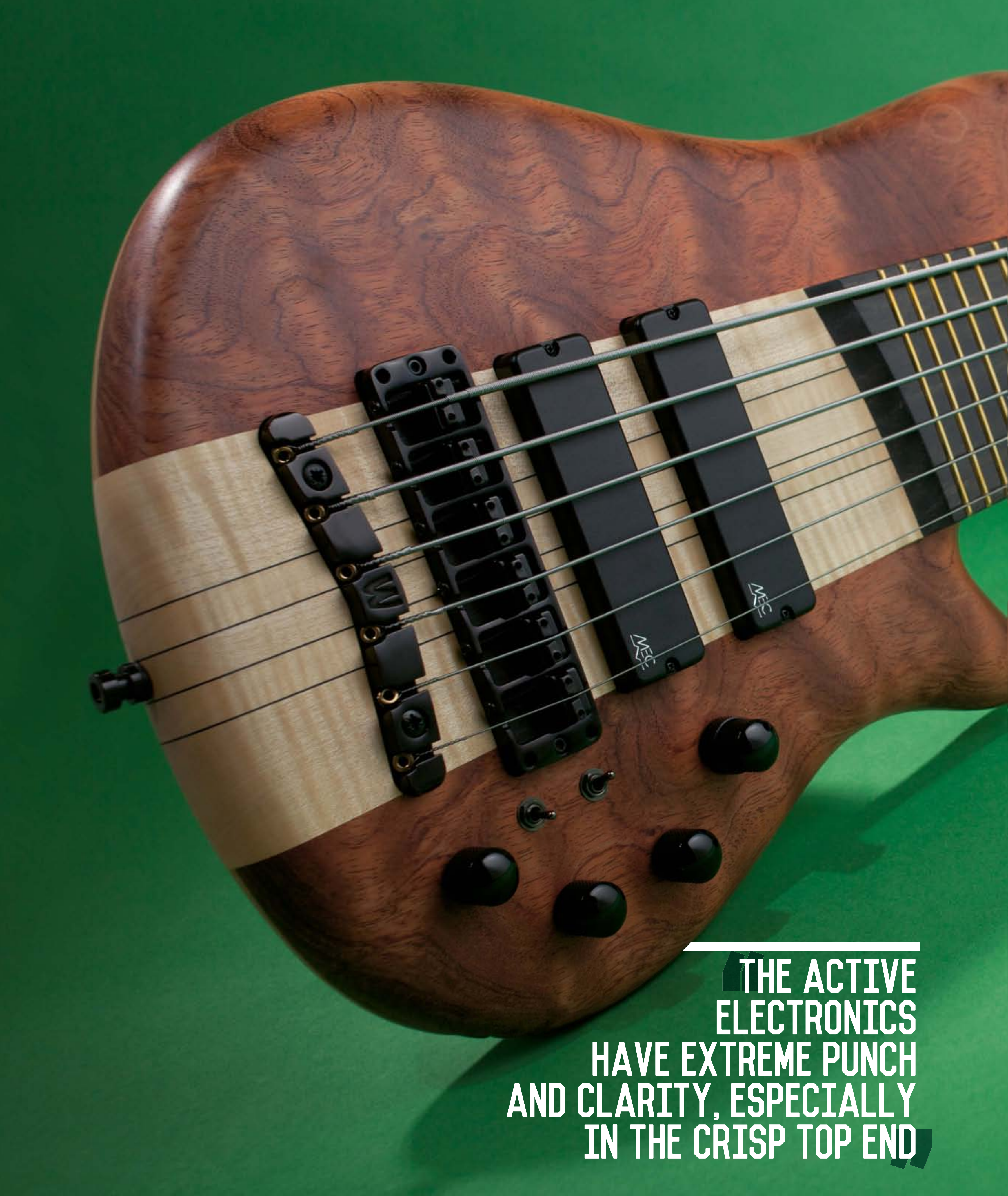
However, where we see this bass finding its most useful spot is in a funk band, exactly where it supposed to be. Funk-friendly basses are everywhere these days, and you certainly don't need to spend this much money to get one. Still, the Paramatrix is that rare thing – a bass with as much personality as its owner – so if that's what you're after, get yourself one with our total approval. Oh, and if you do end up playing one in a metal band, send us a picture immediately…

Status® Graphite

Your Next Choice

Headed, Headless, 4-string, 5-string, 6-string, Graphite Composite, Exotic Woods, Through-neck, Bolt-on Neck, Fretted, Half-Fretted, Plain Fretless, Lined Fretless, 3-band Active EQ, 2-band Active EQ, Passive, Paramatrix Pickups, Soap-bar Pickups, P/J Pickups, MM Pickups, Piezo Pickups, Coil-tap Pickups, Front LED's, Side LED's, Wrap-Around LED's, Red LED's, Green LED's, Blue LED's, Amber LEDs, White LED's, Woven Graphite Facing, Woven Chrome Facing, Solid Body, Semi-Acoustic Body, Black Hardware, Gold Hardware, Chrome Hardware, 32" Scale, 34" Scale, 16.5mm Spacing, 18mm Spacing, 19mm Spacing, Etc...

Proudly Made in England
www.status-graphite.com
+44 (0)1206 868150



"THE ACTIVE ELECTRONICS HAVE EXTREME PUNCH AND CLARITY, ESPECIALLY IN THE CRISP TOP END"

WARWICK

THUMB SC 6

MIKE HINE GETS HIS DIGITS ALL OVER THIS TOP-END EURO-BASS

Warwick Guitars & Basses
www.warwick.de

At the high end of the bass guitar market there are few manufacturers more prestigious and well regarded than German brand Warwick. So when a familiar-looking heavy-duty flight case, resembling a giant steel sarcophagus, arrived at *BGM* HQ, we were more than a little eager to get stuck in.

We had been anticipating delivery of the latest Thumb SC – a modern update on one of Warwick's most venerable models – for some time. But what does £4,749-worth of exotic woods and top-grade electronics actually translate to in the all-important performance stakes?

BUILD QUALITY

All the hallmarks of the German manufacturer are here, including downwardly-angled tuners and the single, unmistakable W on the unusually-shaped headstock – a powerful reassurance of quality. That letter alone will alert savvy bassists that this is serious territory – but if you still need any convincing, a quick glance at the pommelé bubinga top should do it.

From here on, it's not so much a question of whether this bass offers quality – rather, how much quality can it offer, and does that translate into value for money? After all, a quick glance at this instrument's price tag is enough to make any musician's accountant break out in a nervous sweat.

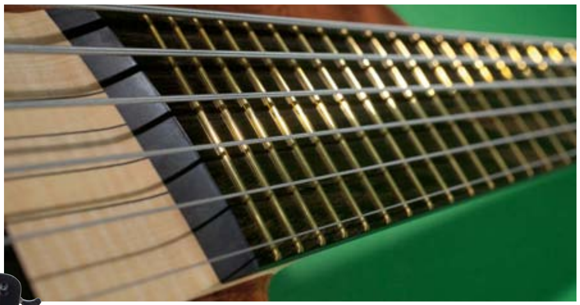
The SC feels solid and weighty, while the flowing lines and exquisite contouring are droolworthy. Once you've drunk in the rich browns of the top wood, flipping the bass over reveals its sumptuous pale underside, consisting of a US swamp ash body, shot through with the flame maple neck with ekanga veneer stripes – four of them, running along both top and bottom of the bass. The neck-through design means the woods seem to seamlessly flow into one another, especially considering the single cutaway design – the long upper part of the body doesn't deviate from the neck. Instead it is conjoined, giving the impression that the SC is one solid piece of wood. It's a design that committed four-string rockers might find a little goofy – or even downright fugly – but the discerning funk maverick or boutique bass enthusiast will have acquired the taste by now.

Warwick describes the 34" fingerboard as 'tiger stripe' ebony, owing to the light brown hues that punctuate the rich, dark browns. It really is a thing of beauty, and a bit of a behemoth, too. Our six-string test model's neck is 10cm wide at the 26th fret, and around 5.5cm at the Just-A-Nut III brass nut. That's a considerable width to wrap your hand around, but the shallow cut of the neck makes things a little less daunting.

The bridge comes in a two-piece format – black, like the rest of the hardware – with saddles fully adjustable for height, spacing and scale length. The brass nut can also be raised and lowered, as can the MEC pickups, via Warwick's Easy Rider pickup suspension system, which uses coiled springs and brass screw anchors to set the height of the soapbars.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

The Thumb SC sits nicely on the shoulder, though if playing while seated the tiny bottom cutaway doesn't sit all that easily on the thigh, with a tendency to slip if you shift your position. However, the upside of the cutaway is the free access it yields to the upper reaches of that vast fingerboard. With 26 frets and six strings to play with – offering four octaves above the 12th fret alone – it's almost like having another instrument appended to your bass.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £4,749
COLOUR | Natural oil finish; coloured oil finish and high polish finish available
BODY | Bubinga pommelé top; US swamp ash body
NECK | Flame maple with ekanga veneer stripes
FINGERBOARD | Tiger-stripe ebony
PICKUPS | 2x passive MEC soapbar humbuckers
ELECTRONICS | Active MEC 3-way electronics
CONTROLS | Stacked volume/pickup balance with push-pull function; treble, mid, and bass controls; two mini-switches for coil splitting
TUNERS | Warwick
HARDWARE | Colour black
BRIDGE | Warwick two-piece, solid brass
MADE IN | Germany
NUT | Just-A-Nut III
NUT WIDTH | 55mm
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
FRETS | 26, jumbo bronze
WEIGHT | 5.4kg
CASE | RockCase flight case included
LEFT-HAND VERSION | Available

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Superb build quality, visually stunning, and diverse tonal possibilities
MINUS | A little weighty; sky-high price tag puts it out of the reach of most
OVERALL | A dream instrument for the discerning active bass guitar enthusiast

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Despite its width, the shallow cut of the neck makes moving around the fingerboard very straightforward. The fret widths make for easy playing, being nicely spaced right up into the top reaches. It only begins to become noticeably clustered around the 20th fret, but even then you've got position dots – which glow in the dark – down the side of the fingerboard to help you navigate that densely packed high-end region. Jamming acoustically on the Thumb SC reveals a nice natural tonality and allows you to settle into the feel of the neck and the note positioning before switching on...

Powered by a 9V battery, the Thumb SC's active electronics incorporate a control panel offering individual treble, mid, and bass EQ knobs, while the two MEC passive soapbar humbuckers have a stacked master volume/balance knob, which also acts as the passive/active push-pull. And the fun doesn't stop there: each pickup has its own mini toggle switch for coil splitting. In the up position, the switch puts the pickup in series mode, in the centre position it acts as a single coil, while the down position makes the pickups act in parallel. Each of these options alters the way the current flows between the pickups, and determines whether they work together or interdependently while wired to the same source. In practice, this all adds up to offer an absolute miasma of tone options.

Rolling the balance all the way towards the neck pickup, with the EQ flat, the Thumb SC emits a classic, well-rounded active rock tone, while rolling back towards the bridge reveals that punchier, mid-sound that lends itself so well to staccato Motown-esque plucking. Each pickup delivers its expected characteristics with aplomb – but the Thumb SC really comes into its own when making more inventive use of the balance control and EQ.

The active electronics have extreme punch and clarity, especially in the crisp top end. Laying down triads on the D, G and C strings is an absolute joy, given the ease of movement and fingering. Once you've crept up that neck, it's tempting never to come back down!

Down at the bottom end, meanwhile, the lows are thudding but beautifully defined, with a great crispness, even on the low registers of the B string. But whether you want a direct, mid-heavy funky pop tone, or a thicker, sub bass, the Thumb SC will oblige – and then some. Tone sculpting options, along with the balance control, give you access to the entire pantheon of bass sounds – including passive rock if you choose to bypass the active electronics. Slapping is one of this bass's strong points, too, whether you want to scoop out the mid for a classic, beefy funk tone, or roll off the top and bottom for a punchier, modern slap sound. The EQ behaves itself very well while slapping, with neither the bottom becoming too muddy, or the treble too piercing or biting. It's an exercise in controlled, effective bass sounds, covering every permutation across the bass guitar spectrum.

Flicking the humbuckers into parallel mode boosts the output, lifting the already considerable volume of the active electronics into full swing. The cut of the body, too, contributes massively to this bass's big, big tone and massive sustain. You can feel the music surging through that giant slab of wood.

CONCLUSION

If you're a gigging musician with a larger-than-average budget, or a studio-dweller with a penchant for top-quality bass guitars, chances are you either have, or have seriously considered, a Warwick. The Thumb SC is targeted at such players, and unsurprisingly satisfies every demand expected of an instrument of this price: unique, characterful appearance; quality construction; diverse tonal options; and a walk-in-the-park playability that, once you've sampled it, becomes irresistible. Compared to some other high-price options, the Thumb SC has a relatively simple and elegant aesthetic that makes it applicable to many musical situations, both in the studio and on stage. You can't help but wonder how many people can realistically afford a bass like this – but for those dedicated enough to the low-end cause, this instrument will be seventh heaven. ■

LIGHTER | LOUDER
ALL-NEW RUMBLE™ SERIES BASS AMPS
Facebook.com/fendergbi
Twitter.com/fendergbi
© 2014 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. Fender® and Rumble™ are trademarks of FMIC. All rights reserved.
fender.com/rumble
ALL-NEW RUMBLE HEADS, CABINETS AND COMBOS
RE-ENGINEERED WITH CLASSIC FENDER VIBE

RITTER

R8-SINGLECUT FIVE-STRING

AN UNDERSTATED FIVE-STRING FROM THE LUTHIER WHO KNOWS NO BOUNDS? SAY HELLO TO THE R8-SINGLECUT, SAYS MIKE BROOKS

Bass Gear
01189 706925 • www.bassgear.co.uk

Mention the name Jens Ritter to most bassists and you will probably get a Marmite-style reaction to his eccentric creations. As the luthier for whom the word bling was perfectly created, his approach to bass building is limitless. This particular bass carries all the hallmarks of a Ritter creation, yet you may think it looks a little restrained and lacking in the usual Ritter embellishments. Delve a little deeper, though, and you will uncover numerous traits that place it firmly in the Ritter camp resulting in a pricetag of… wait for it… £6,450! Pick yourself off the floor and we'll review its subtleties for you while you recover from the shock.

BUILD QUALITY

Being a singlecut design, the body is naturally curvaceous, with flowing bodylines, although the lower horn looks a little sharp and jagged compared to the rest of the body. As a result of this body style, more timber has been used to create the body but this hasn't created a back- breaking overall weight due to the sculpting, which in turn has created a streamlined body depth. From the front, the body looks like a pool of red liquid: whether this is intentional we don't know, but giving the body the once-over we were surprised by the amount of chamfering to the body. This extreme rear contouring makes it feel as comfortable as possible for the player. The sumptuous hand-polished high gloss red champagne finish isn't as instantly striking as some Ritter finishes, but we think it adds some subtlety to this bass.

The bolt-on neck joint is super-tight, and so it should be as it utilises 13 (yes, you read that right) bolts to secure the three-piece maple neck to the mahogany body, the upper singlecut horn meeting the neck at the 15th fret. Being a five-string instrument with a string spacing of 19 millimetres and a scale of 34.5 inches, the fingerboard is fairly broad, but not uncomfortably so. The rear profile is slim enough to give the bass a high level of playability without alienating those who like a thick neck depth, or players who find five-string basses too much like hard work when it comes to manoeuvring around the neck. A significant neck heel lies behind the nut, but it doesn't affect the playability at all. The gloss finish also works very well without feeling 'sticky' or being a hindrance to those who prefer a satin-style neck finish. In other words, Mr Ritter has hit a fine balance.

The dark ebony fingerboard comes fitted with pure silver oval ring position markers: their appearance can be slightly hypnotic to the player when ascertaining your neck geography and positioning. Most luthiers wouldn't offer these due to the price, but in this instance, they're almost expected. In contrast, mother of pearl dot markers have been used along the side of the neck.

Overall, the neck is immaculate, as you would expect, with an extremely high level of finishing, particularly in terms of the frets and set-up. Regarding the balance and weight distribution, there is a degree of headstock dive but it sits very nicely on a strap in any position that the player requires.

The restrained feel of this bass is maintained by the use of black hardware throughout, with Ritter-designed Gotoh tuners laid out in a 'three over two' arrangement on the significantly pointed headstock, while the nut is made of bone. The bass doesn't feature any outward facing strap buttons as per usual, instead opting for the Dunlop strap mounting system with the mounting points located on one side of the upper horn and the other to the right on the rear of the body. This is unusual, perhaps, but then that's what Ritter basses are all about. The 18-volt, active three-band circuit has been paired with a pair of Ritter Master pickups, namely a Triplebucker and a Slimbucker, which come with crafted ebony pickup covers and controls for volume, treble cut and boost. The controls also offers a push/pull function for coil selection of the bridge pickup, a stacked mid and bass boost and cut and a three-way pickup selector switch. The jack socket has been mounted

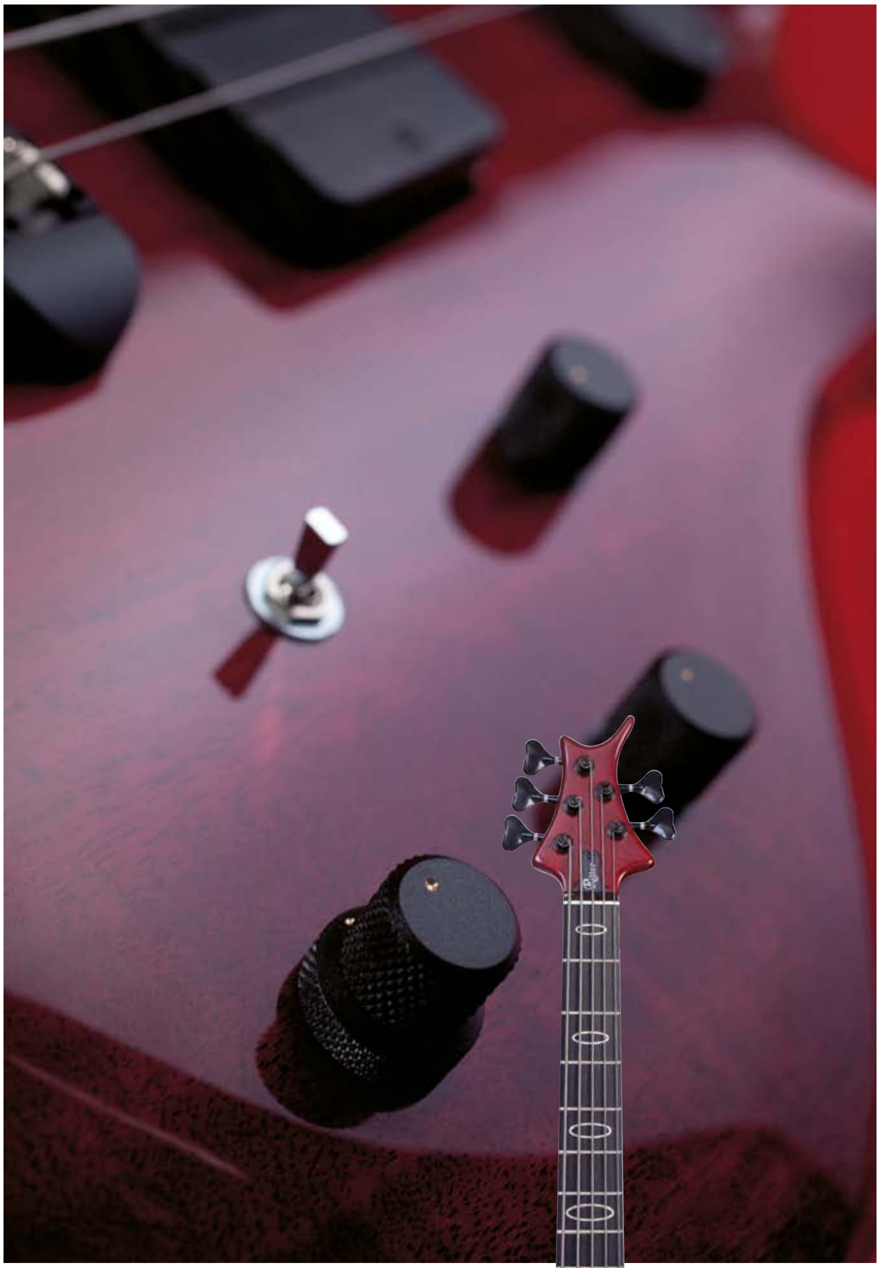
on the rear control plate along with a grub screw for trimming the gain output. Finally, the Ritter B1 bridge features individual string anchors and allows three-way bridge adjustments for action, intonation and string spacing.

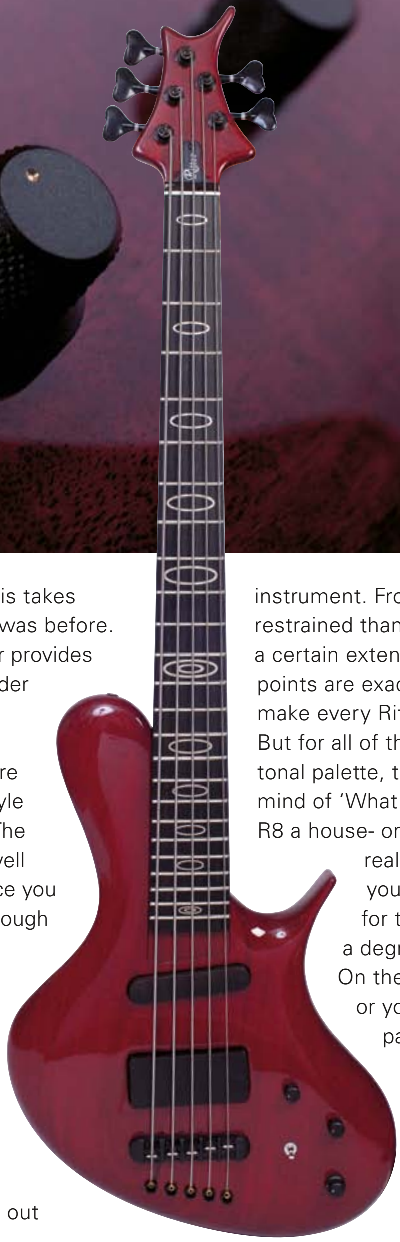
PLAYABILITY AND SOUNDS

The R8 is a real joy to play. The neck definitely isn't hard work and gives the impression of being more like a broad four-string than a five-string. The attention to detail in terms of playability and set-up are very much apparent, as this bass really draws the player in, based on how comfortable it is to wear and play. Unfortunately for those who will no doubt scoff at the price, the design and overall ergonomics are bang on the money so although it doesn't have the most conventional visuals, it is very apparent that a great deal of time and workmanship have gone into creating the playing experience.

Jens has certainly put some thought into the matching of the circuit with the pickups, and the switching possibilities give the player an extremely broad range of tones. With the humbucker soloed as a single coil unit, the bass shows off a powerful, full tone with a fair smattering of honk and twang into the bargain. Adding the neck pickup provides a more rounded tone, but some of the natural top end definition is taken away, although the EQ controls can compensate for that. Soloing the neck pickup is a typically ballsy affair, with the most bassy, traditional-style tone available, but with even less definition.

Selecting the humbucker in its humbucking mode gives a noticeable boost to the bass's delivery, making the instrument sound more 'excitable' with far more power: this takes away some of the politeness that there was before. Adding the neck pickup to the humbucker provides a seriously full-on tone that is made broader when calling the tone controls into play. Everything from a honky burp to a biting but slinky top end with guts and power are all readily available, so no matter what style you play, your needs will be catered for. The slap tone works particularly well, being well defined with some body to the notes once you use the D and G strings for popping. Although the mid and bass controls are powerful, it was noticeable that the mid control affected the character of the signal far more than the bass control, so although it offers a useful boost, it isn't extreme by any means.





CONCLUSION

Where do we start? There's no denying that this is a highly crafted, well thought out instrument. From first viewing, it's noticeably more restrained than many other Ritters out there, but to a certain extent, this works in its favour. The finer points are exactly that, and it is these touches that make every Ritter instrument something special. But for all of the razzmatazz, comfort, playability and tonal palette, there is that nagging doubt in your mind of 'What if it gets damaged?' This makes the R8 a house- or studio-bound bass, which would be a real waste.. At £6,450, it doesn't smack you in the face shouting "I'm here!" and for this sort of money, you would want a degree of that to justify your purchase. On the other hand, if money is no option or you simply fancy a treat, perhaps this particular design will tickle your fancy. The bottom line is that the R8 is definitely a bass made for playing and it would be rude not to make use of it – so perhaps as a working instrument, it justifies its cost. Ponder on!

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

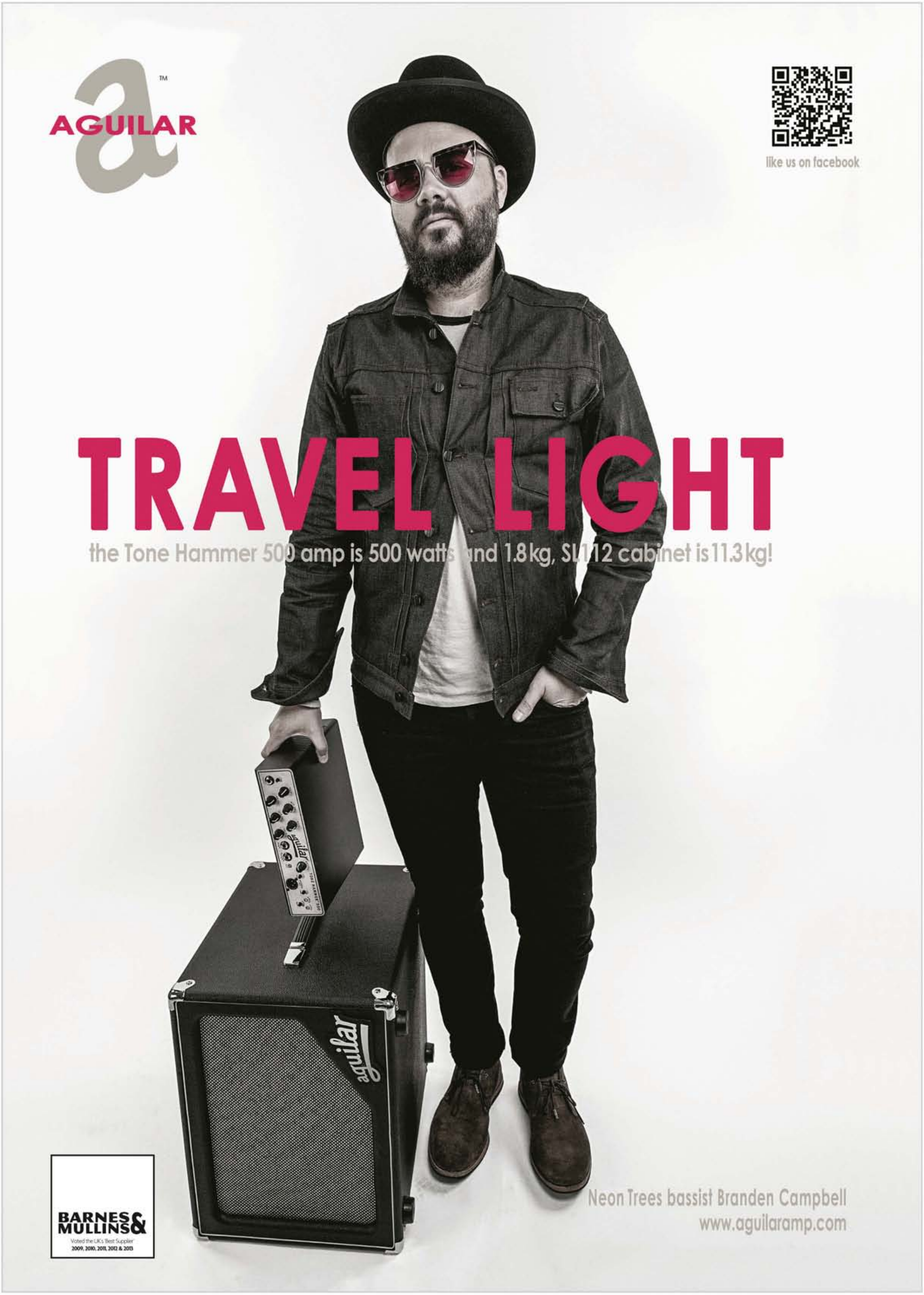
PRICE | £6,450
COLOUR | Red Champagne
BODY | Mahogany
NECK | Maple
FINGERBOARD | Ebony
PICKUPS | Ritter Master Triplebucker (bridge) and Ritter Master Slimbucker (neck)
ELECTRONICS | Ritter C-3 Active three-band EQ
CONTROLS | Volume, pickup switch, treble cut/boost (push/pull coil switch for bridge master bar pickup (up=humbucker/down=humbucking single coil), dual potentiometer for mid cut/boost (on top) and for bass cut/boost (ring)
TUNERS | Ritter BT Design, made by Gotoh
BRIDGE | Ritter 3D / B1 String attachment
MADE IN | Germany
NUT WIDTH | 50mm
NECK JOIN | Bolt-on neck, thirteen bolt
SCALE LENGTH | 34.5" (876mm)
FRETS | 24
WEIGHT | 4.3kg (9lb 7oz)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | Hardcase
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes, as custom order

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A high calibre instrument with a very high spec, plenty of fine detail and enough features to create a very enjoyable playing experience. Playability, comfort, tonal options and performance are all clearly evident.
MINUS | Does it really justify its cost?
OVERALL | A fine example of Jens Ritter's work that is only held back by its price, otherwise there really isn't much to complain about.

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE


AGUILAR
like us on facebook
TRAVEL LIGHT
the Tone Hammer 500 amp is 500 watts and 1.8kg, SL112 cabinet is 11.3kg!
Neon Trees bassist Branden Campbell
www.aguilaramp.com
BARNES & MULLINS
Voted the UK's Best Supplier
2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 & 2013

FODERA

MATT GARRISON STANDARD 5

THERE ARE EXPENSIVE BASSES – AND THEN THERE ARE REALLY EXPENSIVE BASSES. PREPARE TO WATCH YOUR CREDIT-CARD MELT, WARNS MIKE BROOKS

Bass Gear
01189 706925 ● www.bassgear.co.uk

When this amazing bass was presented for *BGM's* perusal, it was obvious that irrespective of the finer points of this review, there will be those among you that will always pooh-pooh an instrument such as this. It would be short-sighted of us not to feature the occasional dream bass, though – even if its pricetag falls into the 'superbass' league. What exactly do you get for your hard-earned folding stuff?

BUILD QUALITY

It's hard to tell if it's the Fodera name, the £7450 pricetag or having the actual instrument in your hands that creates such a high level of expectancy. You really want to be knocked out by this bass. What the MGS lacks in bling and pizzazz, it compensates for in the knowledge that you are playing an instrument that is a top-notch example of craftsmanship and understated quality. The woodwork is exemplary throughout, and although the singlecut design may not appeal to everyone, for this particular bass, the design coupled with the contouring and high level of finishing make for a very comfortable, organic instrument. The rounded body curve along the top of the body is very comfortable, although the rear has some sharper lines and edges. The bulky body depth actually helps to highlight the extent of the contouring and scalloping to the rear of the bass.

Despite the large body shape, the 33" neck scale and 17.5mm string spacing make the instrument feel well proportioned, and assuming that American superbassist Matt Garrison had some input regarding the neck profile, he certainly knows how to pick a great one – as this is the perfect profile and thickness, an absolute bullseye when it comes to comfortable fretting. The fingerboard dimensions are equally well measured without becoming too wide, as the neck reaches the body. Initially, the singlecut design looks as though the player's fretting hand will be hindered from the rear, as it reaches the body with nowhere for their thumb to go. However, Fodera have incorporated a curved scallop into the rear of the body which allows the thumb to sit between the bass and the

player's stomach, which works very well indeed. However, you may find some resistance between the area behind fret 21 up to fret 26. The deep lower cutaway offers no such problems, with unhindered access up to the 26th fret.

The familiar Fodera angled headstock comes complete with a body-matching facing and the now customary butterfly, in a particularly fetching piece of abalone: again, the quality of the finishing is apparent. With a headstock of this size, it is inevitable that there will be some degree of neck dive, but the bass balances well when the player is seated and shows no balancing issues when placed on a strap. Black hardware has been used throughout (machine heads with detuner, two-way adjustable bridge, controls) although a brass nut has been included, as per Matt's preference we assume. A quick peek inside the control cavity shows that there is no lack of attention to detail here either, with plenty of copper shielding in place and although the cabling is quite busy, it is well laid-out and tidy.

"THE MGS IS UNDOUBTEDLY A FINE BASS"

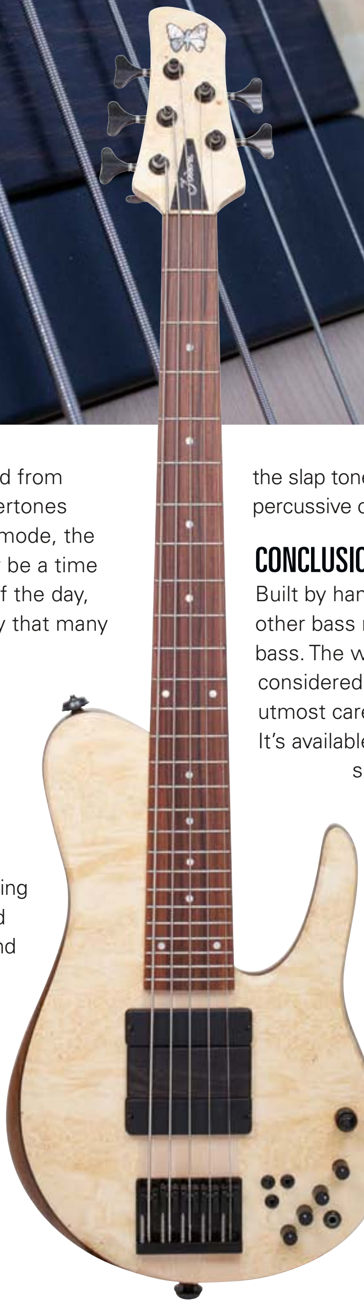
PLAYABILITY AND SOUNDS

So much of this instrument's construction has a direct effect on its playability and ease of use. For example, the slim, thin frets give the impression that you could actually be playing a fretless – and in practice, it does feel as though you are getting to grips with the actual timber, so it comes as no surprise that a nasal fretless tone underlies the basic character of the bass. The overall set-up is magnificent, and the playability is effortless as your fretting hand glides over the noticeably thinner frets. These offer no obstacle to your playing, and it becomes evident early on that a heavy-handed approach isn't required: a gentler, softer playing style yields equally impressive results.

The Seymour Duncan dual coil pickups have been matched with a custom Fodera/Pope-designed 18-volt preamp (active and passive) with a three-band EQ. The controls give the player a huge degree of control over the tones that can be coaxed from this beauty. Naturally, the rich woody overtones are always there: when used in passive mode, the overall sound is familiar. Sure, there may be a time when a tame passive tone is the order of the day, but in general day-to-day use, it's unlikely that many players will be reverting to it.

In active mode, the MGS really comes alive.The inherent tones are reinforced by the natural vibrancy and resonance of the timbers and to its credit, the preamp doesn't override the voice of the bass: it simply enhances it and gives it a stronger projection. None of the EQ's sounds are extreme at any point, with the coil tap adding some extra mid-presence should you need it. Dialling in different amounts of each band simply brought the point home that this is a class act, where all the components are well matched. The ramp between the pickups is a useful addition, although not all players swear by them.

If there is one sound that I couldn't coax out of it, it would be a glassy, cutting treble tone. Try as I might, it just isn't there, probably because the player around whom this bass is designed doesn't need it. So if you're looking for the slap tone of your dreams with a ton of top-end percussive clarity, I don't think you'll find it here.



CONCLUSIONS

Built by hand in Brooklyn, New York alongside Fodera's other bass ranges, the MGS is undoubtedly a fine bass. The whole package has been thought out, considered carefully and been constructed with the utmost care to produce a bass of the highest calibre. It's available in one configuration only, however. I'm sure anyone making this sort of outlay would probably want to incorporate ideas or preferences of their own – so basically you have to take the MGS as it is, or have a bass custom-built for you by Fodera. At this price, security could also be an issue. Sure, you could keep the MGS locked up at home, although that would surely be a waste – but taking it out for sessions or gigs will be a worry of the highest order, no matter how well protected it is.

To conclude? For those who hanker for the finer things in life, and are equipped with the funds to afford such extravagance, by all means book a viewing and a test drive. For the rest of us mere mortals, we can but dream.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £7450
COLOUR | Natural
BODY | Walnut with box elder burl top
NECK | Three-piece hard rock maple
FINGERBOARD | Pau ferro
PICKUPS | Seymour Duncan dual coil pickups x 2
ELECTRONICS | Fodera/Pope custom 18-volt active/passive, three-band EQ
CONTROLS | Volume/tone roll-off (stacked), pickup pan, treble/mid/bass (cut/boost), active/passive switch, coil tap switch, mid range switch
TUNERS | Fodera tuners, Schaller-style
BRIDGE | Fodera, two-way adjustable, through-bridge stringing
MADE IN | USA
NUT WIDTH | 48mm
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
SCALE LENGTH | 33"
FRETS | 26
WEIGHT | 4.7kg (10lb 3oz)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | Hard case
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A seriously top-notch signature model that incorporates everything you would expect from a Fodera bass
MINUS | Two words… the price!
OVERALL | Extravagant, but overwhelmingly classy.

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

Bass Amps Guide

WHERE THE LOUD NOISES GET EVEN LOUDER… BEHOLD THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE MACHINES THAT GIVE YOUR BASS PARTS LIFE, FROM THE PETITE TO THE PHENOMENAL

Time was when a bass amp was an intimidating beast. If you needed a smallish combo for the rehearsal room, you could just about lug it around by yourself, although sometimes they felt as if someone had poured concrete into them during the manufacturing process. Anything bigger, though, and you were stuffed if you didn't have the funds to employ a roadie. Back pain specialists just loved bass players...

Nowadays, all that has changed. You can make a hugely loud noise these days with a head that you can slip into a briefcase, assuming you've got a reasonable cab to hand – and many venues allow your bass signal to go straight to the desk, eliminating the need for any cabs at all. Sure, you'll still need to lug the big boxes for clubs or practices, but they've become more user-friendly too over the years: it's a great (and convenient) time to be a bass player.

In this section of *The Ultimate Bass Guide* we've collected a stack of reviews of cool bass amplification, from the weeny (TC Electronic and EA, we're looking at you!) to the titanic (don't lean on that Orange). Somewhere in here is your dream amp, we reckon. In you go... and don't forget your earplugs.

TC ELECTRONIC

BH250

TONEPRINT TECHNOLOGY IS INTEGRATED INTO THE NEW BH250 BASS AMP HEAD AT A PRICE THAT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, SAYS DAVE CLARKE

TC Electronic
www.tcelectronic.com

They're lightweight, portable, powerful, and increasingly able to hold their own in a playground full of bigger brothers. The micro-amp revolution shows no sign of letting up, and I, for one, am all for it. These little boxes of dynamite may not yet be the default amps for your average stadium-sized gigs, but I doubt that many years will pass before the only amp that any bassist ever needs will be the size of an old Filofax. Danish brand TC Electronic's new BH250 bass head is a significant step in this direction, possessing all the aforementioned qualities, and it's now integrated with TCE's impressive TonePrint technology.

But I had one nagging doubt. Would the amp's 250 watts – connected to a cabinet, or combination of cabs, with a minimum impedance of 4 ohms – be enough for bassists looking for an amp able to hold its own in small-to-medium-sized venues, without burning a hole in your pocket? If so, the BH250's price tag of just £235 seems almost too good to be true…

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

As with most micro-amps, the BH250's dimensions (8.7"x2.5"x9.1") mean that it easily slips into a gig-bag pocket. And, at just 4lb (1.8kg), you needn't feel guilty about asking anyone over the age of five years old to carry it up a flight of stairs for you. Still, at that weight you could be forgiven for questioning what exactly the wizards at TC Electronic have put under the hood of their new bass amp head. The answer, I'm happy to report, is above and beyond what you could reasonably expect for such an unfathomably low financial outlay.

Standing on four sturdy rubber feet, this class-D amp is housed in a metal chassis with a stylish red brushed and anodised aluminum front plate, complete with built-in 'ears' for optional rack mounting. The front panel is home to the input socket, a gain switch for active and passive basses, a built-in tuner for four-, five- and six-string basses, a mute switch for all outputs, a master volume control, and what initially appears to be a simple set of bass, middle and treble tone controls. I say 'simple', but TC Electronic's intelligently contoured tone controls cut and boost at different frequencies (bass cut, 80Hz; bass boost, 100Hz; mid cut, 500Hz; mid boost, 800Hz; treble cut, 1800Hz; treble boost, 3150Hz), making it easier to access an effective tone to suit your own playing requirements.

TC Electronic's pièce de résistance, however, is the integration of their superb TonePrint technology, which allows for a variety of preset effects to be beamed to the amp via a free app available on smartphones or, if you prefer, via a USB cable connected directly to a computer. The white TonePrint knob on the front panel controls the effects' input level, and the default setting is a warm, rich chorus. BassDrive, Flanger, Octaver, Vibrato and SpectraComp are all available to beam up as and when required. There are several variations for each of these effects, including numerous signature TonePrints, created by the likes of Duff McKagan, Mark King, Gail Ann Dorsey and Nathan East, among many other respected bassists.

The back of the amp is home to the on-off switch, the mains socket, the optional footswitch jack input, a USB socket, speaker output (Neutrik Speakon), a mini-jack headphone socket, and a balanced output XLR socket which can be set at either pre- or post-preamp. There is also a mini-jack Aux In/Rehearsal input and the amp

comes with a mini-jack to mini-jack lead for connection to an iPhone or similar playback device. The headphone socket also plays back any signal connected to the Aux In/Rehearsal input, allowing you to play along to any connected audio source at any time of day or night without fear of being arrested for antisocial behaviour.

SOUND QUALITY

Using a Musicman Stingray, I made instant use of the BH250's built-in tuner, which runs continuously, with or without the mute switch activated. Considering that this is a feature that you are pretty much guaranteed to utilise every time you plug your bass in, it remains a mystery why all bass amp manufacturers don't include a built-in tuner as a standard feature. It's also one less bit of kit to carry around with you.

Setting the amp's three EQ controls to 12 o'clock, my bass and I were instantly greeted by TC's recognisable warm, clear tone. Using the intelligently contoured tone controls, I was quickly able to tap into a wide range of tones, often from just playing around with the mid-EQ. When I dropped the mid-EQ I enjoyed a fat and funky tone. In contrast, when I cranked-up the mid-EQ, it resulted in a decidedly harder, edgier rock tone. Pretty simple stuff, but very effective.

The concerns I had over the BH250 delivering enough volume to satisfy the requirements of a small to medium-sized venue were all but forgotten after turning the master volume control to maximum. I was actually shocked at the volume generated. With the Stingray's bottom end rumbling like Barry White gargling iron filings, I was troubling my eardrums and diaphragm more than the amp. But even at seemingly excessive volume, the tone managed to remain surprisingly tight and punchy, with the only deterioration in sound quality being very much courtesy of the SoundTech speaker cabinets struggling to keep up.

Realistically, I couldn't seriously imagine needing to turn the master volume control much past the one or two o'clock position to cover most of the gig scenarios I'm likely to encounter. However, if you simply have to have the added security and headroom provided by an amp with Death Star-type firepower then there are plenty of alternatives on the market, complete with a higher price tag.

I'd been looking forward to trying out the TonePrint technology for some time. Downloading the free app to my iPhone took a matter of seconds and, on the TonePrint section of the app, I decided to try one of the flanger effects. As a fan of Mark King I was eager to check out his signature TonePrint, which is endearingly called 'Sweet Minger'!

Following the simple direction on my iPhone's screen, I held the phone's speaker an inch from the pickup, before a '3-2-1' onscreen countdown began. The effect was then beamed through the guitar's pickups into the amp. As it does this, the phone quietly makes a sound similar to that of a fax machine, before the TonePrint's LED light flashes on the front of the amp to indicate that it has successfully received the effect, and it's ready to use. Then it's just a matter of setting the level of the effect. The whole process from start to finish took about 12 seconds.

Readers who are worried that this all sounds a bit complicated and gimmicky – trust me, it isn't. I now had Mark King's 'Sweet Minger' flanger effect running through the amp and was thoroughly enjoying having 'his sound' filling the rehearsal studio. I swiftly proceeded with an awful attempt to replicate Mark's bass playing.

Lots more fun followed as I dialled in Duff McKagan's chorus tone, Roscoe Becks' octaver tone and Michael Shuman's vibrato tone. A word of warning, though: one of TC Electronic's own BassDrive tones called 'The Beast' is inexplicably set at a volume so loud it made my speakers feed back, sending me scurrying for cover in the far corner of the studio. Attempting to turn down everything while disorientated by the equivalent of a sonic landmine is, I fear, something all unsuspecting TonePrint-using bassists will eventually experience. In fairness to the other BassDrive tones on offer, though, they all work a treat and deliver some very satisfying sounds. My only disappointment was the lack of an envelope filter in the TonePrint effects range. I asked TC Electronic about this and, without committing to a date, was told that there's every chance of one becoming available in the future. If and when this does happen, all you'd have to do to obtain the new effect is perform a simple app update on your phone and a firmware update for the amp via your computer or laptop using the USB lead. While TC are at it, I'm hoping they can arrange for Bootsy Collins to create his own signature TonePrint, just so we can help to keep the funk alive as authentically as possible, you dig?

Until such updates occur, I'll still be heading to rehearsals and gigs armed with my trusty envelope filter pedal, but this is still preferable to packing half-a-dozen different pedals, complete with the requisite hardware.

CONCLUSION

TC Electronic's BH250 bass amp looks good, sounds great, packs a big punch and comes with several very useful features, while the TonePrint technology serves as the icing on the cake. At just £235, I honestly had to check (twice) that this is indeed the correct price for this unit. The BH250 is equally at home in the studio and at both small and medium-sized venues, and for many bassists, this amp will leave nothing to be desired. With this in mind, I will be very surprised if the BH250 doesn't become a huge hit with bass-players all around the world.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £235
MADE IN | China
INPUTS | 1/4 inch jack, Aux In
OUTPUTS | Balanced XLR with pre/post pre-amp selector, headphone out
EQ | Three band bass, mid and treble
POWER | 250 watts
FEATURES | Built-in tuner, TonePrint technology, mute switch
WEIGHT | 4lb
DIMENSIONS | 8.7"x2.5"x9.1"

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Powerful with small dimensions, highly affordable, TonePrint technology
MINUS | No envelope filter in the TonePrint effects range (file under 'nit-picking')
OVERALL | A brilliant bass amp at an unbeatable price

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

EBS

REIDMAR 250 AND EBS CLASSIC LINE 1X12

SWEDEN'S EBS PRESENT THEIR FIRST LIGHTWEIGHT HEAD. HAS THE REDUCTION IN SIZE AND WEIGHT LED TO A REDUCTION IN THAT TRADEMARK EBS QUALITY? ASKS BEN COOPER

Sound Technology Ltd
01462 480000 ● www.soundtech.co.uk

Amplifiers have an immense impact on your sound. Yes the sound is in your hands to some extent, and the bass and its various woods and pickups will all have a part to play, but an amp will have a huge impact on your final tone. EBS has always striven to make amps that are transparent and don't dramatically alter the tone of your bass, unless you want it to. With a list of endorsees as long as a very long arm they're clearly doing something right. Now they've taken steps into the ever burgeoning world of lightweight heads with the Reidmar 250. Let's see if this dinky amp can stand up alongside its bigger brothers.

CLASSIC LINE 1x12 CABS

The two cabs provided with the amp for our test are compact 1x12s from EBS' Classic Line series. These are the perfect companion to the lightweight Reidmar 250. The cabs have a single side mounted grab handle, and this is perfect for moving them around. They're relatively light at 17 kilos, so shouldn't present any issues in transportation.

We reviewed these cabs in *BGM* 68 so we won't spend too long treading over old ground here but they feature a tweeter as well as the 12" speaker, and this is switchable. When it's engaged it really does add some top end clarity and bite, but without becoming harsh and brittle. The cabs are solidly built as you'd expect of EBS, with substantial corner protectors and nice fat rubber feet to ensure they stay where you put them.

REIDMAR 250 FEATURES

The amp is small and compact, as you would expect from a product designed with these factors in mind. There is some graphic work on the amp's casing which has a Nordic flavour. This may or may not be to your taste, personally it didn't do anything for me, but as it's done in a "black on black" style, it doesn't really standout that clearly. The head also has a plastic side handle for moving it, and this is tight and sturdy.

The front panel offers up all your usual suspects: input, gain, volume. You can access the built-in compressor here, and you've got a three band EQ section. The mid control is sweepable so you can hone in on the frequency you want to cut or boost. There's also a bright switch for giving a 15 dB boost at 10khz. All the controls are smooth and responsive, and like the rest of the amp feel extremely well made.

The back panel is quite spartan. There's a speakon connector for hooking up to your cabs plus a line out and headphone jack. There's also an FX loop and a balanced DI out with a ground lift. You can also select whether your EQ is pre or post the DI signal. With just the power switch on the back, everything is kept clean and functional as space is at a premium.

SOUNDS

EBS stated that with the Reidmar 250 they weren't looking to make the lightest, smallest head out there, but instead to translate that classic EBS tone, into a lightweight package. Plugging in with everything flat, it's quickly apparent that they've managed just that.

Creating amps that are transparent, and allow the instrument's natural tone to speak out has always been the stated aim of EBS, and that's exactly what's on offer here. The natural low-mid bias of my test bass was in evidence. As I ventured to the top end of the instrument the highs were quite glassy, but this has always been characteristic of the EBS sound, and they don't overstep into harshness. The sound has a real smoothness to it, and even digging in with some 16th note fingerstyle playing, the amp retained this clarity of tone. It's perfectly possible to get growl from the amp, though. Thanks to the selectable mids, I gave a nice bump around the 250hz mark and found it easy to get a gruntier sound from

the amp that was perfect for fingerstyle funk.

With its naturally smooth character and defined highs you'd think the Reidmar would work a treat for slap, and you'd be bang on. It's very easy to get absolutely perfect slap tones from the amp, and the built in compressor really comes into its own here, adding some tight punch and making sure those popped notes don't make your ears bleed.

However, despite its remarkable clarity it is possible to push the Reidmar and get some grittier tones from it. Hiking the mids, driving the amp hard and grabbing a plectrum I coaxed some dirty rock tones. It obviously doesn't sound quite as good as a driven valve amp, but it has a crunchy character of its own that is quite pleasing.

It also has to be said that the Reidmar is amazingly loud. Some may look at it and think that as a 250 watt head it might not be up to really loud rock bands, or bigger venues, but trust me the Reidmar is incredibly loud, and in fact seems to have much more volume on tap than some higher rated heads. This makes the Reidmar an extremely tempting proposition indeed.

CONCLUSION

In short, I was absolutely blown away by the Reidmar. The amp looks great (even if the decorative work is not entirely to everyone's taste, it's pretty low-key), and is so much louder than you would expect. But most importantly of all the Reidmar 250 sounds absolutely incredible. EBS has a well-deserved reputation for creating amplifiers that offer incredibly tonal response and variety and this head is no exception. Couple this to its size and weight and the Reidmar 250 is one of the most outstanding amps you're likely to come across at this price point.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

EBS CLASSIC LINE 1 X 12 (CL-112)
PRICE | £312
MADE IN | China
POWER | 250W RMS
INPUTS | Neutrik Speakon Connector
OUTPUTS | Neutrik Speakon Connector
SPEAKERS | 1x12" Speaker plus 2" tweeter (with on/off switch)
WEIGHT | 17.5 kg
DIMENSIONS | 49x34x38cm

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

EBS REIDMAR 250
PRICE | £399
MADE IN | China
POWER OUTPUT | 250W RMS
INPUTS | Instrument
OUTPUTS | Speaker (250W RMS @ 4 ohms, 125W @ 8ohms), Phones, Line Out, Balanced XLR
CONTROLS | Character button, Gain, Comp/Limit, Filter Active button, Bass, Middle, Freq, Treble, Bright, Volume.
FEATURES | 250 W RMS, Switched Digital Power Amp, Balanced XLR-Output, Built-In Compressor, Effects Loop, 4 Ohms Output, four-band EQ with Bright Filter
WEIGHT | 3.2kg
DIMENSIONS | 36 x 25 x 7.5 cm

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Top looks and build quality. Superb sounds. Much louder than you would expect.
MINUS | Really, for £399 there's nothing to pick fault with!
OVERALL | An amp that offers outstanding sound quality and versatility in a compact and light package, and for an exceptional price.

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

Tony Garnier
Warwick®
Basses, Amps & Rock'n Roll.
The first Carbon-Neutral Company in the Music Industry
Family Owned - Solar Powered - Sustainably Manufactured in a Green Environment
www.warwick.de
info@warwick.de
www.warwick-distribution.de
www.facebook.de/warwickmusicdistribution
ClimatePartner
climate neutral
Instrument | ID: 11117-1212-1002
Basses, Amps & Rock'n Roll.
FSC
www.fsc.org
FSC® C108987
EMAS
DIN 14007
DIN 18001
ISO 50001

HUGHES & KETTNER

BASSKICK SERIES

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN OF ROCKERS THERAPY? LAYS HIS HANDS ON H&K'S NEW BASSKICK LINE

John Hornby Skewes
www.jhs.co.uk

Most people associate the Hughes & Kettner brand with their top-end guitar amplification: you only need to witness the buttery tones which Alex Lifeson has adopted on the last few Rush albums and tours to attest to this. The bass end of H&K's work has often been overlooked, but it is unlikely that any of us are unaware of their fabled Kickback series, which bolted clever design and big tone onto affordable, easily transportable combos. To that end, H&K has unleashed not one but three combos into the bass market under the Basskick moniker.

IN USE

Starting with the biggest and most powerful of the trio, we have the BK300. First impressions are that the build quality is up to the usual high Hughes & Kettner standards, with a solid metal grille on the front and a highly visible, blue control panel. It's physically not much bigger than the other two combos, but even though it's quite heavy, is still a one-man lift thanks to the compact dimensions and the recesses tucked into the side.

The front control panel is clearly laid out with secure, chunky knobs and it's nice to see an amp that hasn't gone for complicated EQ controls with gimmicky FX or amp-modelling features. In keeping with that straightforward approach, what you get is separate passive and active input plus gain and master volume, with a useful four-band parallel EQ. For further refinements to the sound there's also a compressor, as well as a punch switch and a high frequency horn control, both of which can be operated via an optional footswitch.

On the back panel there's a balanced XLR out, which is perfect for gigging and recording, plus a clean FX loop, which will please those of you who use pedals or have a multi-FX rack. There's also a speaker extension for another cab.

Firing it up with a flattened EQ, there's an immediately full, thick tone that complemented my test Music Man well, emphasising the bright character of the guitar. Tweaking the EQ gave some varied results and it was refreshing to see a small(ish) amp with dual mid controls, which added a lot of scope and accuracy to the midrange.

Popping in the punch switch moved the sound into a slightly more aggressive realm, and turning up the gain resulted in some great warm rock tones. Backing off the gain and enabling the HF switch got us some killer slap and funk attack, although the slight HF hiss was a little off-putting.

The H&K-designed Tube Growl compression feature was interesting, as the circuitry is apparently intended to emulate a tube amp while keeping the signal full and dynamic. Hence the compression was quite subtle: even on full it didn't feel as if it was squashing the signal too hard. Some folk might prefer it to be a bit more extreme to get the notes pumping a bit more evenly, but the general tone and clarity meant that I never felt as if the definition of the notes was getting lost.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

HUGHES & KETTNER BK100
PRICE | £399
POWER OUTPUT | 100 watts
SPEAKERS | 1x15" with HF
INPUTS | Passive
OUTPUTS | Line out
FEATURES | FX loop, headphones output
CONTROLS | Gain, bass, mid, high, master
DIMENSIONS | 498 x 565 x 355 mm
WEIGHT | 25 kg/56 lb

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Very compact. Excellent build quality
MINUS | Slight hiss
OVERALL | Definitely in the shadow of its two bigger, more impressive associates

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
VALUE ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"THE TONAL RANGE IS SUITABLE FOR PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING FROM METAL RIGHT THROUGH TO POP OR FUNK"

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

HUGHES & KETTNER BK200
PRICE | £529
POWER OUTPUT | 200 watts
SPEAKERS | 1x15 inch with switchable HF horn
INPUTS | Passive and Active
OUTPUTS | Balanced XLR, 1x4-8 ohms to external speaker
FEATURES | Compressor, punch switch, HF switch, FX loop, headphones output, optional footswitch
CONTROLS | Gain, Low, Low-Mid, Hi-Mid, High, Master volume
DIMENSIONS | 552 x 604 x 385 mm
WEIGHT | 32 kg/70 lb

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Great tones and plenty of features. Compact
MINUS | That hiss when the tweeter is switched in
OVERALL | A great buy and a combo that performs like a more expensive amp

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

The BK200 is not much smaller dimension-wise, and again it's a sturdy amp with the same front and back panel controls, 15" speaker and input/output options as the BK300. It's slightly more sedate in volume terms, but still boasts great clarity and versatile EQ options. There is a similar tonal range as the BK300 and because these combos seem to have so much volume headroom, the BK200 certainly doesn't feel like a lesser option compared to its larger sibling.

By no means the runt of the litter, there's the BK100, a more stripped-down version of the other two. There's a slight rejig with regard to the features, and the FX loop and headphones sockets have moved onto the front panel while the EQ is now a three-band affair. The balanced XLR out and external speaker cab outputs are gone altogether, but for less than £400 that's no surprise. The build quality is of the same high standard, with the combo once again putting out a surprising amount of volume. Sure, there was some flatness to the sound and the slight HF hiss from the tweeter was still present, but size- and price-wise, the BK100 is a practice or beginner amp, pitched at a very busy and competitive market.

CONCLUSION

Rather than focus on gimmicky features or scrimp on the actual sonics, it's nice to see the H&K build quality and tone reflected in these products. The tonal range is suitable for pretty much anything from metal right through to pop or funk, with the compressor really helping to keep the 15" speaker bottom end tight, even when operating at higher volumes. Some might find the variety of sounds a bit bland, but the BK300 and BK200 are definitely worthy of serious consideration for anyone looking for a compact rehearsal or small to mid-sized gig amp. The BK100 is a worthy effort, but it's not as tonally impressive as the larger models, so compare before you buy.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

HUGHES & KETTNER BK300
PRICE | £649
POWER OUTPUT | 300 watts
SPEAKERS | 1x15 inch with switchable HF horn
INPUTS | Passive and Active
OUTPUTS | Balanced XLR, 1x4-8 ohms to external speaker
FEATURES | Compressor, punch switch, HF switch, FX loop, headphones output, optional footswitch
CONTROLS | Gain, Low, Low-Mid, Hi-Mid, High, Master volume
DIMENSIONS | 611 x 625 x 385 mm
WEIGHT | 36 kg/79 lb

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Straightforward quality tones. Great features
MINUS | Only that slight tweeter hiss. We're not hiss-obsessed, honestly…
OVERALL | For the price, the features, build quality, volume and sheer quality of this combo are excellent

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

FLIP YOUR TOP ALL OVER AGAIN

The original Ampeg B-15 Portaflex is the most sought-after and widely recorded bass amp in history. The flip-top cabs and double-baffle design have been revolutionary since the early '60s and they're still badass today. With the Heritage B-15N, you can have this classic design in a superbly authentic reissue. Need some more power? Explore a modern take on the Ampeg classic with the new Portaflex Series. Choose from three different high-wattage lightweight heads, two different flip-top cabs or the versatile ported extension cabs. Mix-and-match to create the ultimate Ampeg Portaflex. Genuine Ampeg tone in your own custom configuration.

THE ROUND SOUND

ampeg.com

Copyright © 2013 LOUD Technologies Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Exclusive UK distribution by POLAR audio | www.polaraudio.co.uk | tel: 01444 258258

AMPEG PORTAFLEX

PF-210HE

BEN COOPER FLIPS HIS LID OVER AMPEG'S CUNNING PORTAFLEX

Ampeg
www.ampeg.com

Whether you're talking about James Jamerson and Duck Dunn using B15s to lay down some grooving soul, or Billy Sheehan and other rockers doling out crushing bass-lines courtesy of SVT heads and 8x10 cabs, Ampeg has been the choice of top bass players for decades.

The Portaflex series of heads and cabs offers a neat, functional option for the working bass player. It allows you to couple an Ampeg Portaflex head to the lid of the cab, which can then be flipped over to store the head inside the cab during transit, much like the B15.

BUILD QUALITY

The PF210-HE looks stunning. It's relatively compact, and though it's not the lightest 2x10 cab out there, it isn't too much to handle. The black diamond tolex covering has a

> THANKS TO THE INCLUSION OF A ONE-INCH TWEETER, THE PF210 ALSO DELIVERS SMOOTH HIGHS

light sheen that is perfectly complemented by the vintage B15-style silver grille. Built from 15mm poplar ply, the cabinet feels solid, and is lined inside with sound-deadening material to limit rattle and vibrations. The fliptop is held in place by four reassuringly tight and sturdy latches, which snap shut with some force and hold the lid firmly in place. All in all, this is an attractive and superbly constructed cab – as you'd expect from a company such as Ampeg.

To find out how the Portaflex cab couples up with a head, I borrowed a Portaflex head from my local Ampeg dealer, Mansons Guitars, and hooked it up with the screws included. The head attached very snugly indeed, and essentially makes the cab and head into a combo. It works well, but obviously if you don't have (or want) a Portaflex head it's a redundant feature. One nice touch is the inclusion of a zipper pouch held inside the bottom of the cab by a velcro strip, which can hold a speaker and power cable while in transit.

SOUND QUALITY

In use the PF210-HE delivers just what you'd expect. The 2x10 Eminence speakers can handle plenty of bass and the cabinet delivers that quintessential Ampeg tone: warm and round with definition and punch. The sealed design of the cabinet results in a tight sound, with a midrange focus.

Thanks to the inclusion of a one-inch tweeter, the PF210 also delivers smooth highs. The tweeter doesn't have a graded attenuator, but has three settings: on, off or -6dB cut. With it on, the highs are never piercing or glassy, meaning the cabinet continues to retain its vintage warmth with just a little added clarity.

CONCLUSION

The PF210-HE performs much as you'd expect from a cab of this type. The natural response is one of warmth and clarity, but it'll handle whatever you want to throw at it. Obviously, this probably won't move enough air if you're competing with a couple of loud guitarists and a heavy drummer, but for quieter bands, studio work and smaller gigs the PF210-HE would be ideally suited, especially when coupled with a Portaflex head.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £347
POWER | 450W RMS power handling @ 8 ohms
FEATURES | 2x10 ceramic Eminence LF drivers, 1" HF compression driver with L-Pad level control, frequency response 53 Hz to 17 kHz
DIMENSIONS | 23"x21"x14"
WEIGHT | 48 lbs / 21.6 kg

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Well made, beautiful, classic styling. Capable of handling varied sounds
MINUS | A bit on the heavy side
OVERALL | A lovely little cab that would suit small gigs and rehearsals

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

MARKBASS CMD

JB PLAYERS SCHOOL

JEFF BERLIN'S MUSIC CONSERVATOIRE LENDS ITS NAME TO A NEW MARKBASS COMBO. KEV SANDERS FEELS THE WIDTH

MSL Professional
sales@mslpro.co.uk ● 0207 118 0133

Back in the day, companies like Peavey, Laney and Carlsbro all had hefty 1x15" combos as mainstays of their bass amp ranges. For some while now though, they seem to have fallen from fashion. Sure, there are still plenty you can buy, but they're nothing like as common as they once were. There are several reasons for this, but mainly, of course, it's because developments in the quality of electronics and speaker materials mean that a current, good quality bass combo with a powerful amp and 12" driver can easily outperform one of the old behemoths in virtually every way – and mean fewer trips to the osteopath. *BGM* columnist Jeff Berlin has enjoyed a long and close association with Markbass, to the extent that the company has recently developed a combo specifically for use at his own music school, the Players School of Music – and now, you can buy one too.

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

This new amp represents something of a departure for Markbass. Firstly, the CMD JB is assembled in Indonesia and this, along with the use of a less expensive speaker unit, enables the company to pitch this amp at a lower price point. Let's be clear, we're not talking bargain basement here, but it should mean that more of us will be able to get onto the Markbass property ladder.

The first thing to strike you is just how small and light this amp is. Markbass has consistently been at the forefront in the design and development of compact and lightweight bass gear but even so, it's still a pleasant surprise when you take it out of its box for the first time. The CMD JB is constructed from 20mm poplar laminate. Poplar is a great choice as not only does it have superior tonal qualities to the more commonly used birch ply, it's also much lighter. The cabinet is built completely void free: glued, screwed and sealed internally – a time-consuming, expensive and unusual practice on an amp at this price.

It's covered in a smart black 'carpet' and has a tough steel grille protecting the pressed chassis 15" speaker, which is baffle-mounted. This isn't the same unit as used on the Jeff Berlin Signature amp, but it seems well matched to the smaller amp's output. The cabinet is finished almost as well inside as it is out, and is lined with acoustic wadding, another quality touch. Markbass kit has always been manufactured to a high standard, using quality materials, and this amp seems to be no exception despite

the lower price. A proper-sized handle on top makes moving the amp easy and secure, while black corner protectors complete the exterior furniture.

Set into the top of the cabinet you have what is basically a LittleMark 250 amp head. Most amp brands have their own corporate layout, and if you've used any Markbass kit before you'll immediately feel at home here. On the left there are two inputs, one normal jack and a balanced line XLR, useful if you're using the amp for double bass and want to use a mic rather than a pick-up. Next is the gain with a small LED clip light, then on to the main EQ section. This consists of Bass, Treble and two Mids (hi and lo), all with a hefty plus or minus 16dB of cut or boost. This alone would make for a versatile amp, but the next two controls are, I think, what sets this preamp apart. First up is the VLE control. This stands for Vintage Loudspeaker Emulator and it does pretty much what you'd expect, slowly rolling off the highs and lows to give you a much more valve-like, organic tone. Next to this is the VPF (Variable Pre-shape Filter); again it's very simple, offering a variable amount of mid scoop useful for dialling in an instant slap tone.

> "IT DOESN'T NECESSARILY MAKE YOU SOUND LIKE JEFF BERLIN, BUT THE QUALITY OF THE SOUND IS VERY OBVIOUS RIGHT FROM THE WORD GO"

SOUND QUALITY

From the moment you plug in a bass and switch on, you just know this is going to be good. I mean, it doesn't necessarily make you sound like Jeff Berlin, but the quality of the sound is very obvious right from the word go. It's hard to pinpoint a tonal signature for this combo and given the price, unusual speaker configuration and lack of HF unit, it sounds impressively neutral at low and mid volumes. This means the sound of your bass is accurately replicated and, even with the EQ set flat, you immediately have a good working bass sound. Another sure sign of quality is the almost total lack of background hum. Even with the gain and master volumes cranked way up, it's virtually silent: this would make a brilliant little studio amp.

Plugging in an active five-string Jazz, the tone is gorgeous: thick, punchy and rounded, but with plenty of bandwidth and definition. Adjusting the EQ didn't take long at all and I found a perfect bass tone with everything virtually flat, just a little low mid backed off and a tiny bit of high added. Moving on to the filters, I first added some of the VLE. With this set about a third on you have a gorgeous retro Motown sound – like an antique Ampeg B15 fliptop, but without the hum. The VPF control also proved to be really useful and with the rest of the EQ set flat you can find a wide range of usable tones with this one control.

The obvious question I want answered is, will a combo with just a 15" driver and no HF unit in a small cabinet sound bass-heavy and unfocused? Well as I said, at practice and rehearsal volumes the amp sounds great, although there are limitations that become apparent when you need more volume. Playing with a drummer, pianist and horn player on a jazz gig, my own Minimark 121P combo usually has no problems at all, but the CMD JB combo seemed to struggle to keep up, both in terms of volume and dynamic response. So while you could use this amp on small and medium sized gigs, this doesn't seem to be where it's best suited.

CONCLUSION

It's hard to know how to assess this amp: as a practice combo, it's fantastic, but do you need a 15" speaker in a practice amp? As a gigging amp it cuts it up to a point, but at higher volumes the limitations of a lower-spec single 15" driver in a small box with 'only' 150 watts means that you may find yourself constantly pushing up the volume and EQ top end. You could add an extension cab: a 12" with a horn would be perfect, upping the output of the amp to 250 watts and increasing the bandwidth, but that misses the point of using a combo in the first place. However, this amp was designed for Jeff Berlin's Players School, where presumably it will be used for practice and smallish performances – and for that purpose, I can't think of a better amp.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £509
INPUTS | ¼" jack plus Bal. line XLR
CONTROLS | Gain, Low, Mid low, Mid high, High (all +/- 16dB), VLE (Vintage Loudspeaker Emulator)/VPF (Variable Preshape Filter) Line out, Master Vol, Effect send/return, Tuner out, Ground lift switch, XLR out
PREAMP | Solid state
SPEAKER | 1x15"
TWEETER | None
BASS REFLEX PORT | Rear facing
IMPEDANCE | 8 ohms
SPEAKER POWER HANDLING | 250w rms (as standard)
AMP OUTPUT POWER | 250w @ 4 ohm / 150w @ 8 ohm
FREQUENCY RESPONSE | 45 hz to 5 khz
SENSITIVITY | 99 dB SPL
WEIGHT | 40.8 lb / 18.5 kg
DIMENSIONS | (mm) (HxWxD) 467 x 467 x 480

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | All the benefits of a 15" driver in a compact package – smaller and lighter than some 12" combos. Fantastic, deep, classy sound at lower volumes. Can easily be used as the basis for a larger stack if you need more power
MINUS | No HF unit, some players may miss the (very) top-end sparkle a horn or tweeter can add
OVERALL | At lower volumes the amp works great, sounding clear and focused, however if you need massive on-stage volume or you're looking for a harsh slap sound, then the high end would be a little softer than ideal – you might be better off looking for more power

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★☆☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

EA iAMP MICRO

SAM WISE INVESTIGATES THIS SMALL BUT POWERFUL AMP FOR BASSISTS WHO PREFER PORTABILITY

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

Euphonic Audio has been around since 1981 as a manufacturer of high end speakers for the audiophile market, but it was only in 1995 that EA turned its attention to bass amps. With co-founder Larry Ullman a professional bass player, EA knew what it was looking for, and today, bass amps is all EA does, and the hi-fi speaker manufacture has ceased altogether.

EA produces a range of conventionally sized bass heads, but what we have here is the iAmp Micro, a head unit designed for bassists who would prefer not to put their back out lifting something the weight of a block of flats. Little amps like this have become more and more popular over the last few years, and in combination with the almost complete disappearance of backline from large venue touring rigs, perhaps the sight of panting bass players, bent over under the weight of their gear, is soon to be lost forever.

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

Let's start with appearance, since that's invariably where you'll begin unless you chance to encounter the iAmp in the dark. More than anything, the little EA reminds me of my father's hi-fi when I was a kid. The head is not rack width, in fact it seems certain the enclosure is designed around nothing other than the size of the internal components, and the demands of a well-populated control panel. It's a simple black powder-coated box with a brushed aluminium control panel: no ears, no surround, just a box. It's a little bit bigger than a paperback; perhaps the size of the box of chocolates you'd give your significant other before explaining why you had to buy another bass amp. In terms of carrying it, I would have no qualms about throwing it in my shoulder bag, and at 2.3lbs, my shoulder would have no more complaint than if it had been a large bag of sugar. The plain brushed aluminium knobs combine with the front panel to look very much like an item of high end 70s stereo equipment, which is to say handsome, in a workmanlike way that suggests it was born on a workbench, not on a stylist's drawing board.

You get two channels with the Micro, with slightly different mid EQ profiles; channel one gets 500hz to suit electric basses, and channel two 800hz to suit upright basses, which is probably enough on its own to make it worth a try for those who switch between instruments in the same gig. The channel selector is interesting, in that if you have leads in both inputs, it switches both input and channel, but should you have an instrument connected only to channel one, it will then switch the signal from that connector between the two channels, in a nod to the fact that bass players will do exactly what they like with those channels, regardless of what the manufacturer believes they are for.

> "THE EQ IS PRETTY FLEXIBLE, BUT IT DOESN'T INTRODUCE ANYTHING INTO THE TONE THAT COULD LEGALLY BE CALLED CHARACTER"

It's a very simple signal path from there: gain, three-band EQ, and a master volume control, plus a mute switch (helpfully, the amp always starts in mute mode). There's an FX loop with a mix control – although this acts on both channels, when it might be nice to control it independently for each – a tuner send, a DI out, and that's your lot. The back panel has nothing but a speakon connector, a power socket, and the on/off switch, which nobody could call cluttered.

Inside is an all solid-state 550-watt amp; let's be clear, this is an amp designed for clean, clean, and cleaner, so those wishing to dirty the place up will need to use some of the space the tiny amp frees up to house some pedals.

Certainly the Micro gives an impression of quality; it feels strong and the controls are silky. It lacks corner protectors, but given the all-metal construction, you may feel that you are more in need of protection from the corners than protection for the corners.

SOUND QUALITY

We had two EA cabinets to play with here, a 2x12 and a 1x15, so we started with the former. Setting everything flat, the first impression that you get is of an unusual EQ; flat really is flat, where the profile on most amps is scooped. It makes for a very neutral tone, which could sound rather lifeless if it were left that way. What's nice about this tone is that it really lets the tone of the bass shine through; it's not an amp that stamps its signature on everything you do. What it does really well is deliver a clean, neutral tone; your bass pickups, but louder. The EQ is pretty flexible, but it doesn't introduce anything into the tone that could legally be called character. Similarly, there's no distortion available, or at least, none that you'll enjoy hearing. Like any amp, if you absolutely crank it to the sky, you can get it to break up, but if you're looking for gentle, warming harmonics, you're out of luck.

Moving to the 1x15 cab, the shift in balance is immediately evident, if not overly dramatic. In simple terms, if you want punch, you'll choose the 2x12, and if you want a greater emphasis on trouser-flapping depth, you'll go for the 1x15. In either case, it's very easy to get a great clean tone from the little beast: no faff, no confusion, just start flat and tweak to taste. What's lovely for the player is the way the details are done right: with the availability of channel switching from one input, and the fact that the amp always starts in mute mode, everything makes it clear that the iAmp has been thought through by someone who understands the realities of bass playing.

CONCLUSION

Given the variety of basses and the world of tone modelling and effects available to bassists, none of us needs an amp to make the tonal running for us, and indeed, some of us need the amp not to. To those people, I commend the iAmp Micro wholeheartedly. If you purchase an Ampeg B15, you'll get a B15 tone all night long; you can try to get it to do a Bassman impression using your electronics, but you will always have a mountain to climb. The iAmp will suit the player who wants to shift tones significantly down to the ground, as long as he or she is willing to provide the effects to do it. You may never fall in love with this amp the way you would with something characterful and tonally unique, but you might come to rely on it as you never could on one of those.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £550
POWER | 300 watts, 2x12 or 1x15 cabinet options
CHANNELS | Two channels with different profiles
FEATURES | Intelligent input switching, 3 band EQ with high pass filter, FX Loop, DI Out, Tuner out, Master volume

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Top quality, excellent, powerful, flexible clean tones
MINUS | No real tonal personality
OVERALL | A super compact clean sound machine that you'll love

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	10/10 stars
SOUND QUALITY	8/10 stars
VALUE	8/10 stars

Bass Direct

www.bassdirect.co.uk

www.facebook.com/bassdirectuk

Finding your way....

GALLIEN-KRUEGER

MB800

GALLIEN-KRUEGER'S FLAGSHIP MB800 MICRO-AMP IS THE LATEST OFFERING IN THE DOWNSIZING REVOLUTION. CAN LIEUTENANT DAVE CLARKE HANDLE THIS LITTLE MONSTER?

Polar Audio
www.polaraudio.co.uk ● www.gallien.com

In a world where just about every gigging bass player has apologetically requested the assistance of someone to help manoeuvre a monolithic bass rig into position, it's little wonder we're revelling in the continued rise of the micro-amp.

Consider that Gallien-Krueger's MB800 has the ability to belt out a staggering 800w at four ohms, yet isn't much bigger than a Nintento Wii, and it's easy to understand why. Forget the car boot: this amp could be stowed away in the glove box. It really does slip easily into a gig bag, too, and weighing in at just 4.9lbs, you'll hardly notice you're carrying it.

As chiropractors unite to ban such technological advances from further diminishing income derived from fixing crocked bassists, it's clear the micro-amp is here to stay. But size isn't everything, right?

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

With dimensions measuring just 1.75" (height) by 11" (width) by 9" (depth), the MB800 really is incredibly compact: it's hard to believe that this amp can deliver on the promise of a mighty 800w. Housed in a brushed metal casing, the amp sits on four chunky rubber feet, giving it two-thirds of an inch clearance from the cab of your choice. The amp can also be easily racked, with its neat 'ears' already in place on both sides of the front panel.

When switching the amp on, the first thing you'll notice is that all the front panel controls are illuminated. Nothing over the top, just simple lighting for ease of use

during those dimly-lit moments onstage. In addition to the input socket and mute switch, there's a -10dB pad/clip indicator, a contour control and Gain A and Gain B/Level B controls. The level control for Gain B allows for an additional preamp gain level to be set, independent of Gain A. Gain B is activated by simply pressing the knob, or by activating the included footswitch.

The master volume control has a pushbutton limiter, so if power-amp clipping occurs, the knob's indicator flashes red, indicating that the limiter should be engaged. The front panel also features a four-band EQ and, as you would expect, the contour and gain controls enable ease of access to both clear, crisp tones and the infamous GK snarl. The rear panel features a ground lift, a balanced direct out, a pre/post EQ button, an input for the footswitch, a tuner output, return and send FX jack sockets and a headphone/line out socket and switch.

Driven by a Class D power supply and power amp, the MB 800 is kept from overheating by continuously variable fan cooling. Another key characteristic is the FET (field effect transistor) driven preamp which, as with all GK preamps, incorporates their GIVE (Gate Induced Valve Effect) technology for a consistent bass tone.

SOUND QUALITY

After hooking the amp up to a Tech Sound System 2x10 cabinet, I switched the amp on and was immediately greeted by the aforementioned illuminated front panel. Using an Aria Pro II SB-1000 to get a basic level, I altered the EQ to suit and decided to crank up the amp in true 'let's see what this baby can do' style. After all, with the promise of such immense power from such a tiny package, you've got to erase any cynicism you might have, right?

Now, for those of you who've seen the film *Back To The Future*, you'll recall the scene where Marty McFly plugs into Doc Brown's mega-amp and, after turning everything up to max, hits a power chord that sends him flying through the air, propelled backwards by the sheer force of the volume. Of course, that didn't happen here, but when the power of the MB800 was fully unleashed, that scene immediately sprang to mind. Make no mistake: this is very, very loud.

Even when pushing the amp to its limit, the tone remained clear. It was simply cruising at incredible volume. In fact, my only real concern was the possibility of

"CONSIDER THAT GALLIEN-KRUEGER'S MB800 HAS THE ABILITY TO BELT OUT A STAGGERING 800W AT FOUR OHMS, YET ISN'T MUCH BIGGER THAN A NINTENDO WII"

"BY EXPERIMENTING WITH THE EQ AND CONTOUR SETTINGS, IT WAS PRETTY EASY TO FIND A RANGE OF SOUNDS THAT MOST BASSISTS WOULD BE MORE THAN HAPPY WITH IN BOTH A STUDIO AND LIVE SETTING"

blowing a speaker. Sure, the amp's fans were working a little harder by this point, and we eventually got the power amp to clip (thus triggering the master volume's warning to engage the limiter), but at that kind of volume you'd expect this to happen.

Personally, I never need to be that loud in a gig situation, so I was left in no doubt that the MB800 really does have the power – and headroom – to meet most gigging bassists' needs. Of course, if you're playing the O2 Arena next week you might look for something a little bigger, but, seriously, how many of us will be gracing one of the enormo-dome's stages in the foreseeable future?

So, what about the tone? Something's got to give when squeezing so much glory into such a small unit, after all. We've already established that the MB800 has more volume than a hen night in Essex, so no problems there. What did concern me, though, was that with the EQ set in a flat 12 o'clock position, there seemed to be an overload of low-mid frequencies, which I really didn't like. I only seemed to find the sound I was looking for after I'd rolled down nearly all of the low-mid EQ.

However, knowing that my Aria is famous for its active mid-range savagery, I switched to passive mode and this made a huge difference to the overall sound, although that low-mid EQ was still rolled down to the seven o'clock position. At this point, I was starting to think that the SB1000 wasn't well suited to extracting the best from the MB800. However, I soon discovered that this is where the amp's contour control comes into its own, decreasing those mid-range frequencies while boosting the bass and top end.

Happy that I'd found a solution to what I thought might be a problem, I decided to switch basses, opting for a five-string Dingwall Afterburner 1. With the Dingwall being a completely different animal to the SB-1000, I needed to add considerably more gain and, once again, I found myself rolling down the low-mid EQ, but only to the 10 o'clock position this time, with the treble and bass settings both at 2 o'clock. Once again, the contour control was swiftly used to good effect. Incidentally, the high-mid EQ is a much more subtle affair compared to the low-mid counterpart, and using it felt like garnish on the excellent tone I'd just found to suit the acoustics of my rehearsal studio.

In the interests of science, and with the Dingwall's B-string winking at me, I turned the MB800's bass EQ up to the max and was soon revelling in the incredible warmth of the truly huge bottom-end, while still retaining remarkable clarity. Most impressive. Switching to Gain B/Level B setting on the amp, I found that wicked GK growl in abundance. I was soon running through overdriven bass gems such Stevie Wonder's 'I Wish' and the Stranglers' 'Peaches' with a big Jazz Club grin on my face. Nice.

By experimenting with the EQ and contour settings, it was pretty easy to find a range of sounds that most bassists would be more than happy with in both a studio and live setting. A quick hook-up to different cabs – this time a Markbass 4x10 and 1x15 – and we had an even heftier sound on our hands. Hell, I even went back to the SB-1000, and was soon moving dust from the rafters and panicking those whose job it is to monitor the Richter scale. I still had that low-mid EQ turned down, though…

CONCLUSION

As one of the best examples of state-of-the-art micro-amps, the MB800 completely deserves Gallien-Krueger's considerable reputation. It's incredibly powerful, sonically versatile and very easy to use. Add to that the amp's unbelievable portability and you really are getting a lot of value for the £569 price tag. While I have very few criticisms of this remarkable amp, the lack of features found on other micro-amps, such as a chromatic tuner or the ability to save any EQ settings, as found on TC Electronic's RH750 for example, might put some off. However, clocking in at £250 cheaper than the RH750, I'm confident that the MB800 will establish itself as one of the best value-for-money micro-amps on the market.

If you'd presented me with the MB800 20 years ago, I'd have accused GK of having dabbled with black magic to make such a beast. However, bass amplification has come a long way in a short time and good things really do come in small packages…

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £569 approx
MADE IN | China
INPUTS | 1/4 inch jack
OUTPUTS | Balanced DI, effects loop jacks, tuner output, switchable line out/headphone jack
EQ | Four-band EQ treble, high-mid, low-mid and bass
OUTPUT POWER | 800 watts at 4 ohms, 560 watts at 8 ohms
CONTROLS | Two available gain modes, -10dB pad, mute switch, contour control, level control for Gain B, master volume with pushbutton limiter
WEIGHT | 4.9lbs (2.23kg)
DIMENSIONS | 1.75" x 11" x 9" / 44mm x 279mm x 228mm

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Incredible power from such a small, light amp. Superb price
MINUS | Low-mid EQ needed reining in with contour control
OVERALL | A brilliant addition to the micro-amp family

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

GK GALLIEN-KRUEGER
MB SERIES
Bass Amplifiers
Glorious GK tone in a powerful, portable package that won't break your back (or the bank)
MB200
MB500
MB800
MB FUSION
800 MB FUSION
Exclusive UK distbribution POLAR audio | www.polaraudio.co.uk | tel: (+44) 01444 258258

AGUILAR

TONE HAMMER 350 AMP SL112 CABINETS

WHERE AMPS ARE CONCERNED, SMALL IS DEFINITELY THE NEW BIG. DOES AGUILAR'S NEW TONE HAMMER HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD? MIKE BROOKS GETS TOOLED UP

Aguilar
www.aguilaramp.com ● Special thanks to Bass Gear (01189 706925, www.bassgear.co.uk) for loaning BGM the Aguilar.

The Aguilar brand has come a long way since its humble beginnings in the mid-90s, building a reputation for high quality products that consistently deliver in studios and on stages around the world. Following on from their popular Tone Hammer 500 amp comes this recently released 350-watt Class D model, aimed at players who require a lightweight solution without compromising tonal delivery, and a useable power rating to get the job done. To show just what this amp is capable of, it has been matched with a pair of Aguilar SL112 cabinets: these will illustrate the true headroom of the amp when spreading the load across two cabs instead of one.

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

It's hard to believe that the cardboard packaging contains a 350-watt amp, weighing in at 1.3 kg. Aguilar have certainly addressed the weight issue despite the metal chassis. With its solid-state preamp and a Class D power section, even though the amp is light, it does feel solidly put together, with all the buttons and controls operating smoothly and turning in a controlled, solid manner. The front panel design is uncluttered and the epitome of simplicity, and Aguilar should be applauded for including the most important and relevant features without cluttering the amp with gimmicks and over-zealous bling.

Running left to right, the ¼-inch jack socket and -10dB pad for active instruments is followed by gain, drive, mid-level (+/- 16dB) and mid-frequency (180Hz-1kHz), bass (+/- 17dB @ 40Hz), treble (+/- 14dB @ 4kHz) and master volume controls. An LED indicator shows when the amp is clipping, followed by a DI-XLR output with selectable pre/post EQ, ground lift and mute controls and operation and status LED indicators. The back of the amp has the simplest rear panel we've seen for some time, with a speakon socket and a ¼-inch jack tuner output, although the fan grille takes up a fair bit of space.

The weight of the cabs is almost laughable: they really make the loading in and out process a joy to the point you could load in your gear in one trip, with a cab in each hand, the amp in your gig bag, and the bass slung on your back. Job done! Constructed from 12mm Lite Ply and featuring a neodymium driver and phenolic tweeter, these cabinets come in with a weight of 11.3 kg. The side carry handle feels strong and secure, while the rear panel boasts one speakon connection, two ¼-inch jack sockets and the tweeter control. Equipped with a power rating of 250 watts at eight ohms, and in terms of frequency response, the cabinets can handle a range from 37Hz all the way upto 16kHz, and can deal with everything the Tone Hammer can throw at them.

SOUND QUALITY

Set up with one cabinet and with the EQ set flat, initial impressions are good indeed. If you apply the gain level just below the clipping point and adjust the master volume in a smooth manner, the increase in volume is gradual, but the power on tap is very evident. This may be a small amp, but it has a big sound indeed, and the quality of the tone is equally impressive. A passive bass sounds ballsy and guttural with a throaty presence, while the tweeter inside the cab does well in handling the treble and midrange response from an active bass.

Adjusting the tone controls of the amp opens up a range of tonal potential, but if you're the sort of player who sets an amp flat and controls tone using the controls on your instrument, the simplicity of this amp will appeal very much to you. However, if you like to know that your amp has the ability to back you up if you need to fine-tune, this amp will do so in a simple, unhindered manner. Spending some time with this amp highlights how well designed the front end is: ultimately, its simplicity is its trump card. Adjusting the mid-frequencies, which can often be an amp's saving grace, is very intuitive.

Adding the second cab makes a significant difference: suddenly the amp is able to breathe, and the sound expands to show just what it can do. Being able to adjust the tweeter on each cab means that you can make one cab more rounded and 'bass biased' while the other has a tight, mid and top focused sound. The tonal delivery with two cabinets is exceptional: the bottom end is incredibly solid and powerful without being boomy, the mids project the sound with authority and punch, and the highs are very articulate. These can be tuned to be glassy and percussive or with significant added presence, depending on your tweeter settings. The drive control comes across as a little too polite: it gives the signal more push without roughing the sound up too much. But with everything else this amp has to offer, this is a minor quibble.

CONCLUSIONS

What can we say? Initial impressions that this may be a set-up lacking guts and power were firmly dashed when it was used at a large function with a four-piece band. It coped admirably, with plenty of master level to spare. You may think two 1x12 cabs may lack the brute force to deal with a full band, but let us allay those fears: this set-up is well and truly up to the task. The whole package is a real eye-opener, and gives the player so much flexibility in terms of using the amp to power one or both cabs and the fact that the whole package is so light in weight. Aguilar has done their homework for sure, and although there may be occasions when a bigger cabinet might be required to shift some serious air, any player opting for this set-up will no doubt feel very pleased with themselves. Oh, and all this is backed up by Aguilar's three-year warranty. What's not to like?

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

AGUILAR TONE HAMMER 350 AMP
PRICE | £479
MADE IN | USA
CONTROLS | -10dB input pad, gain, drive, mid-level (+/- 16dB), mid-frequency (180Hz - 1kHz), bass (+/- 17dB @ 40Hz), treble (+/- 14dB @ 4kHz), master, pre/post EQ selector, ground lift selector, mute selector
INPUTS | ¼-inch instrument input (passive and active)
OUTPUTS | 1x speakon output (8 ohms), XLR DI output, ¼-inch tuner output
POWER OUTPUT | 350 watts @ 4 ohms / 175 watts @ 8 ohms
DIMENSIONS | 70mm(H) x 209mm(W) x 190mm(D)
WEIGHT | 1.3 kg (3 lbs)

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

AGUILAR SL112 CABINETS
PRICE | £649
MADE IN | USA
IMPEDANCE | 8 ohms
POWER HANDLING | 250 watts @ 8 ohms
DIMENSIONS | 377mm(H) x 482mm(W) x 457mm(D)
WEIGHT | 11.33 kg (25 lbs)
SPEAKERS | 1 x 12", phenolic tweeter
CONNECTIONS | 1 x Speakon socket, 2 x ¼-inch jack sockets

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A highly impressive amp coupled with equally impressive cabs that tick all the right boxes. Power, tone and portability in a very neat set-up
MINUS | The overall price isn't low, but you're paying for quality craftsmanship, and the weight implications are worth paying for
OVERALL | A very impressive bass rig: the amp alone is a sure-fire hit

The Toby by Tobias™ Bass is back!

Professional Features at an Affordable Price.

The perfectly balanced ergonomic body design and ultra-comfortable asymmetrical neck profile that discriminating bassists prefer is back. Re-introducing, the Toby™ by Tobias bass. Originally designed by bassist and master luthier Michael Tobias, the new and improved Toby bass offers the look, tone, features and quality found in basses typically costing twice the price. Why spend more when you can experience affordable professional performance with the Toby by Tobias bass.

The new Toby's are available in 4-string and 5-string versions and a wide range of color options. Tobias™ is part of the Gibson family of brands. For more information and a retailer near you, visit **www.epiphone.com/tobias** or call **1-800-4GIBSON**.

TOBIAS® GUITARS
A Division of Gibson Brands

TOBIAS®

THE LONDON MUSIC SHOWS

MAD FOR MUSIC? WE HAVE A SHOW FOR EVERYONE…

DON'T MISS OUT! KEEP UP TO DATE ON THE LONDON MUSIC SHOWS

THE LONDON BASS GUITAR SHOW
IN ASSOCIATION WITH BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

THE BIGGEST SHOW IN THE UK ALL ABOUT THE BASS GUITAR

WWW.LONDONBASSGUITARSHOW.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/LONDONBASSGUITARSHOW
@BASSGUITARSHOW

THE LONDON ACOUSTIC GUITAR SHOW
IN ASSOCIATION WITH ACOUSTIC MAGAZINE

FEATURING ELECTRIC LIVE

THE YEAR'S BEST EVENT FOR ALL THINGS ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC GUITAR

WWW.LONDONACOUSTICGUITARSHOW.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/LONDONACOUSTICGUITARSHOW
@LONDONACOUSTIC

THE LONDON DRUM SHOW

FULLY-DEDICATED SELL-OUT DRUM SHOW FOR THE UK DRUMMING COMMUNITY

WWW.LONDONDRUMSHOW.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/LONDONDRUMT
@LONDONDRUMSHOW

PERFORMANCES FROM THE WORLD'S TOP ARTISTS

ATTEND MASTERCLASSES

HOTTEST NEW GEAR FROM THE BIGGEST BRANDS AT EXCLUSIVE SHOW PRICES

PLUS MUCH MORE

CURRENT SHOW TICKETS ON SALE NOW

ORANGE

AD200B MK III HEAD, OBC810 CAB

THE FUTURE MAY BE BRIGHT, BUT IS IT ORANGE? IAN GLASPER PLUGS IN AND TURNS UP

Orange Amps
www.orangeamps.com

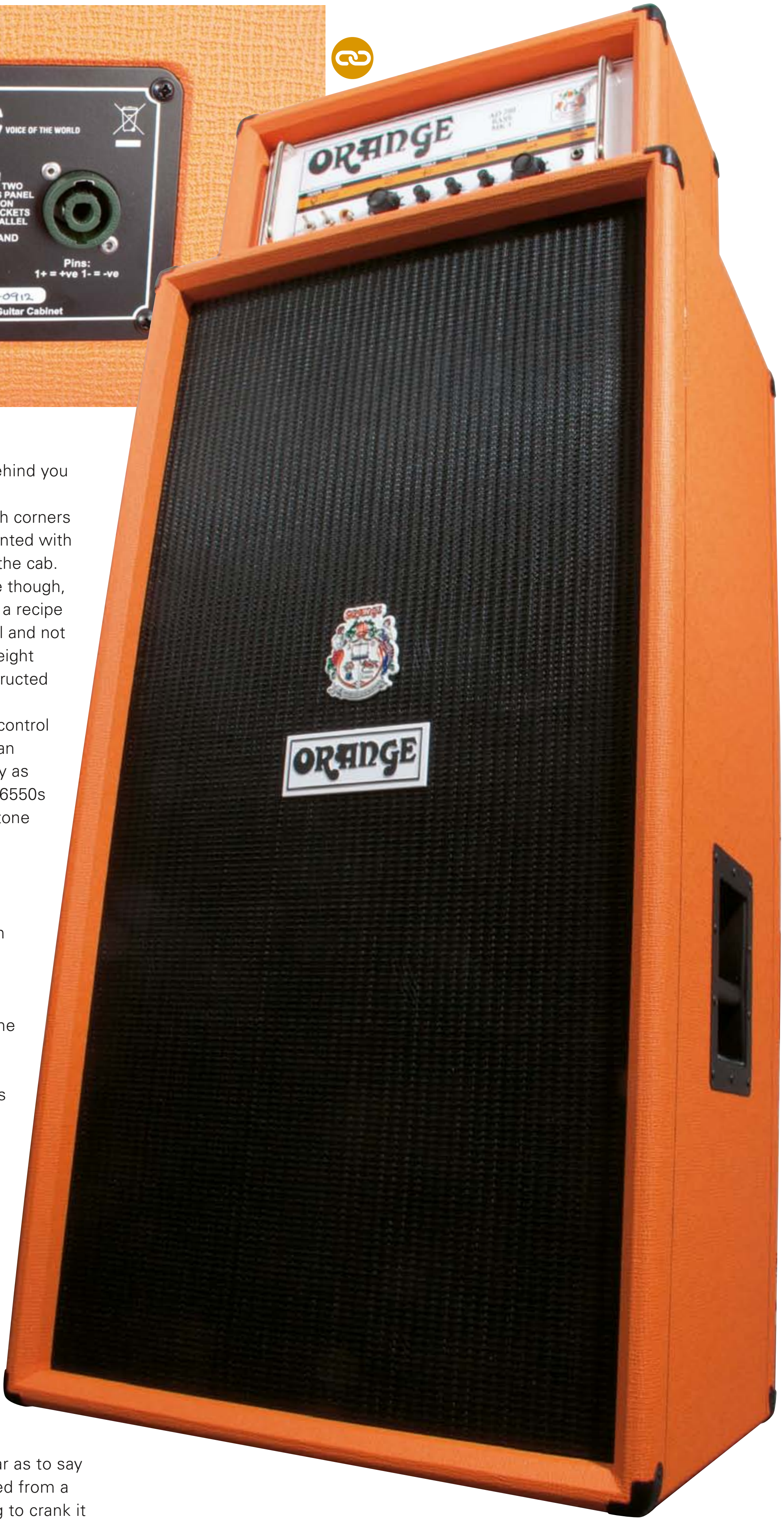
It sounds like the set-up for a crap joke: what's Orange, stands in the corner of the rehearsal room and snarls? But this latest rig from Orange, endorsed by previous *BGM* cover star Glenn Hughes, is no laughing matter. In fact, it's testament to the credibility of the brand that such a garishly coloured stack should not only be taken deadly seriously among the hordes of evil heavy metallers out there, where black is invariably king, but also be a desirable statement of intent for any bassist in need of some proper firepower. Just check the artist roster on the Orange website for proof: everyone who's anyone reliant upon a massive bottom end for their sound is rocking an Orange.

BUILD QUALITY

From the moment you try to lift this enclosure out of its box, you know it's built to last. Put it like this, you wouldn't want to be lugging this bad boy up the fire escape of the Duck and Pheasant too many times a week. At the risk of getting too technical, it's very, very big, and with a formidable presence that just screams 'Earplugs!' at you. Sure, there are smaller, more compact cabinets out there, possibly with a more precise response than this, but do they have the same kind of hulking aesthetic? I think not.

The 13-ply high-density 18mm birch plywood this cabinet is hewn from inspires nothing but complete faith in its robustness, and thankfully it comes equipped with chunky, durable castors and a heavyweight push handle to give you half a chance to manoeuvre it where you want it. If you need to handball it up and down stairs – God forbid! – there are substantial hand-holds located low enough to lift it with assistance. And when you get where you're going, the high-impact anti-skid feet bring it slamming to a halt and keep it rooted there until you've finished rocking out. It's a back breaker, for sure, but well

> "IT'S GREAT TO HAVE AN AMP THAT CAN PUSH THE REQUIRED VOLUME WITHOUT THE SOUNDWAVES DISINTEGRATING TO MUSH AROUND YOU"



worth the effort, because having this beast behind you will definitely put a smile on your face.

The head is of a similar sturdy construct, with corners you could park a dump-truck on, and front-mounted with two meaty metal handles for hoisting up onto the cab. Again, you might want to get a lift off someone though, because amps this heavy and cabs this tall are a recipe for physiotherapy if you're less than six feet tall and not built like the proverbial outhouse. Excessive weight aside, both amp and cab are wonderfully constructed and professionally finished and appear nigh-on indestructible – right down to the humongous control knobs, some of the biggest you'll ever see on an amp. Of course, any tube head is only as sturdy as its weakest link, the valves, and there are four 6550s powering this blast furnace, with a warmth of tone that blows transistors out of the water.

SOUND QUALITY

The amp is incredibly simple to use, probably as simple as any head out there, which is both reassuring and refreshing. With essentially only a master volume and gain, and three tone controls, it takes but seconds to dial up something super low and heavy. No, it's not the most versatile of amplifiers, but easily one of the most powerful, and pound for pound this would give anything on the market a run for its money in the bottom end stakes.

Played with fingers and heavy on the bass frequencies, reggae grooves are imbued with a studio-quaking rumble, while pushing the gain and the mid- to high-end using a pick produces a truly monstrous, dirty rock growl. And best of all, running a SansAmp pedal through it and easing back on the mid summons an incredibly percussive, attacking tone that cuts through any mix with incredible clarity and warmth. It's quite a tightrope to walk to pinpoint that abrasive bite without losing the organic guts of the sound – that satisfying clank with a thick gurgling depth behind it – but this Orange rig nails it, and then some. I'd go so far as to say that it's the punchiest sound I've ever extracted from a bass amp, and it's hard to imagine ever having to crank it

much higher than six. Which isn't very rock 'n' roll, I know, but it's great to have an amp that can push the required volume without the soundwaves disintegrating to mush around you.

Bizarrely, the control configuration has the treble on the left and the bass on the right, which purists might find confusing for all of 30 seconds, but you soon adjust to this arse-backward lay-out, and it's rather nice not having to pore over rows of EQ sliders in search of your sound. You know, the one you had down just right until the support band got onstage and messed with your settings? Fret not, fellow bass warriors, because you can't go wrong with this head – no matter how addled your brain may be from standing in the firing line of this baby for hours on end. Quite literally, plug in and kick ass. There are passive and active inputs depending on your instrument, the active with a -15 db pad so she doesn't burn too hot, and there's a slave output too, but you won't be needing that.

The towering cabinet, with its eight 10" Eminence Legend ceramic speakers, can handle anything and everything this head can throw at it, and would probably chew up and spit out a whole lot more. There's not a hint of rattle, no matter how much you crank the bass, and the higher notes lash out with a spiteful vengeance – this enclosure really moves some air. Whether you're required to lay down a crunching back beat, tightly syncopated to the drummer, or a throbbing groove that ebbs and flows with the song's dynamic, or prefer to cut loose with swathes of chords or embellish the rhythm section with tricky little runs, this tower of strength gives more than enough power to your elbow to do so – with plenty in reserve.

It's probably too much like overkill for a pub's back room, but there's nothing like a little overkill now and again, is there? As long as the hassle of moving it doesn't outweigh the joy of making such sonic statement every time you plug in. And of course it will hold its own on any larger stage too, both visually and sonically. It's a devastating weapon for your arsenal – and you don't want to take a knife to a gunfight, do you?

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

AD200B MK III HEAD
PRICE | £1428
POWER OUTPUT | 200 watts
CONTROLS | Master volume, gain, bass, middle, treble
FEATURES | Active/passive inputs, slave out
DIMENSIONS | 22"x11"x11"
WEIGHT | 26.25 kg

ODC810 CAB
PRICE | £1293
POWER HANDLING | 1200 watts
IMPEDANCE | 4 ohms
FEATURES | 2 x parallel 1/4" input, and one Speakon input
DIMENSIONS | 24"x 48"x15"
WEIGHT | 59.4 kg

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Where do we start? Tone, power, looks… it's all here
MINUS | Your chiropractor bills
OVERALL | A monster spawned in the 70s that towered over the opposition back then, and still casts a long shadow even today. Crush your enemies and see them driven before you!

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ●●●●●●●●●●
SOUND QUALITY ●●●●●●●●●○
VALUE ●●●●●●●○○○

★LEGEND★

GLENN HUGHES

ORANGE

follow us:
orangeamps.com

ACOUSTIC IMAGE

S4 TEN2 DOUBLE BASS COMBO

DAVID ETHERIDGE RUNS THIS TASTY DOUBLE BASS AMP THROUGH ITS PACES, DADDIO

Overwater Bass Emporium
www.acousticimg.com

Choosing an amp can take as much care and attention as choosing your favourite bass. Some players want something loud and roadworthy, while for others small is beautiful and the PA can do the heavy lifting on gigs. For double bass players, getting an amp that's small enough to go next to your bass in the back of the car, light enough not to strain your back, and capable of giving the true sound of the bass without compromise, remains the ideal. Polytone amps have been synonymous with double bass players for decades, while Peterson was the Rolls Royce of bass amps for others, even if they were truly heavyweight. In the main, amps designed with the acoustic player in mind followed fairly traditional practice, but current technology means that things have changed again. This is typified by one US company that has been gaining plaudits across the gigging world: Acoustic Image is taking a truly cutting-edge approach to amplification, with all the trimmings you might expect and a few that may surprise you. In addition, they're marketing the Ten2 specifically for double bass, although their products are also suitable for a variety of instruments – echoes of the 'one amp fits all' approach of the Alligator range of the mid 80s. So, let's look at the Ten2 and see what makes it so suitable.

> "WHILE THE TEN2 ISN'T CHEAP, YOU'RE GETTING CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY"

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

The Ten2 has a distinctive look, with its cylindrical shape giving both strength and levity in a polymer base. There are substantial handgrips on each side, and the twin-channel class D amplifier is very easily removable for use with your own choice of speakers. Removing the amp reveals a small compartment with rubber feet for the amp in standalone mode, while the power supply automatically selects the right voltage anywhere in the world. You've also got a slip-on cover and a shoulder strap for carting the Ten2 around.

The amp itself features many desirable goodies: on this model you have two channels to play with, comprising line/mic inputs plus switchable phantom power and pad, three-band EQ, FX loop (the return of which can double as an extra line input), sweepable LF filter and phase reverse switch. Add to that six onboard FX, a post-EQ switch with XLR direct out, mute, ground lift, and a channel 2 switch for running the power amp in stereo. Around the back there's a limiter switch and a headphone jack, the use of which mutes the line out to the drivers.

The speaker enclosure is different as well: twin 10" drivers are provided, one firing downwards, the other forwards, coupled with a 2.5" tweeter. In addition, there are rotary controls on the back for tweeter attenuation (0db, -6db, off) and room coupling control (100 per cent, 75 per cent, 50 per cent), which sets the level of the downward firing driver to avoid boominess in venues. The handbook provides a variety of workarounds on amp angle and placement to avoid any sound problems. If you need more grunt, you can add the Ten2 EX extension cabinet.

SOUND QUALITY

This is a pure-sounding amp, producing natural results when fed a variety of signals. The overall sound is warm and appealing, offering a wide range of sound shaping options. The EQ works very well in bringing out harmonics and upper range tones on a double bass, with clarity but no harshness of tone. When setting the EQ, subtle settings seem to work best. My five-string bass made the drivers grunt a little on full bass EQ, but for practical purposes you won't need such extreme settings. My guess is that the amp can actually slightly improve on the acoustic sound of some basses, minimising any lack of

tone on budget models. For true aficionados, the ace in the hole here is the twin channels and choice of mic or line inputs. You can have terrific fun trying combinations of piezos, transducers and mics and blending to your heart's content. I tried the old BBC trick of a dynamic mic suspended between the bridge with a couple of rubber bands (cheap, easy and still effective) and got a great sound, and had excellent results from an unbranded pickup I got from Ebay. I even tried the Ten2 with a six-string fretless and produced a very controllable and appealing sound.

The FX are very usable, although you can only adjust the wet/dry amount. My personal preferences are for the chorus and flanging, but you can't set speed or modulation values, which some may find a minor distraction. Overall, though, results are truly excellent.

CONCLUSION

This is an extraordinary amp in many ways. The ease of use, convenience and seemingly bombproof construction (the warranty is impressive: five years on products, speakers for 180 days, and it doesn't matter if you're the first or the 101st owner), all help to make an appealing product. The flexibility of the inputs makes this an amp to watch. Some might bemoan the lack of programmability in the FX department, or amp modelling, but they'll be missing the point: this is an amp for the purist wanting a natural and authentic sound as the starting point, and then adding any creative touches to taste. While the Ten2 isn't cheap, you're getting cutting-edge technology, designed to last a lifetime without aggro. Even if technical nemesis strikes, Acoustic Image offers a trade-in scheme if the required parts are no longer available. Other manufacturers would do well to take note.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £1,592
MADE IN | USA
POWER OUTPUT | 300w RMS into 8Ω, 600w RMS into 4Ω
CONTROLS | 2 channels of: Mic Phantom power (with indicator LED), mic attenuation, Input Level, 3 band EQ, FX loop level and send/return jack sockets, LF cut (sweepable), phase reverse. Onboard FX: Room, Hall, Plate, Delay, Chorus, Flange. Post EQ, Mute, Ground Lift, Stereo operation. Output Level, Limiter switch. On Cabinet: Room coupling control, Tweeter Attenuation.
INPUTS | XLR balanced 600 Ω switchable 10db pad, 1/4" jack 1 MΩ impedance; 2 channels
OUTPUTS | Two Neutrik connectors for onboard speakers and an additional Ten 2 EX cabinet; headphone out jack; XLR direct out
SPEAKERS | Two 10" drivers, one downfiring, one forward-facing, polycone woofers in conjunction with a 2.5" tweeter
WEIGHT | 32lb
DIMENSIONS | 17"x15"x13" (HxWxD)

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Innovative approach with subtlety and exceptional flexibility in a handy package
MINUS | Expensive, but then cutting-edge technology usually is
OVERALL | A radically different approach to amplification that produces supremely musical results

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★★★☆☆

Bass FX Guide

GET YOUR SIZE 12 DOC MARTENS ON – WE'VE GOT SOME SERIOUS STOMP BOXES TO STEP ON...

In 2014, the effects world is a bass player's dream. Every possible version of every possible tone you could possibly dream of is available in multiple units. Some of today's amazing units are tiny, some large; some pricey, some startlingly cheap; some reliable, some as consistent as a monkey with a typewriter. Where do you go for guidance? Why, here of course: we've gathered the coolest effects pedals (and not just pedals: some of these look like computers from the year 4000) and ranged them, as with the basses and amps, cheapest first. The sheer scope of available tone tweaks is what impresses us most, from the sweetest chorus and most psychedelic flange to the meanest distortion and earbleeding storm of delay. You think guitarists have all the fun? We say hell no!

MOOER

MULTI-FX AND SWEEPER FILTER

CHEAP REALLY CAN MEAN CHEERFUL, SAYS JOEL MCIVER. JUST DON'T LOSE THE LITTLE ONE DOWN THE BACK OF THE SOFA

Strings And Things
www.stringsandthings.co.uk

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MOOER BEM BOX BASS MULTI-EFFECTS PROCESSOR
PRICE | £99.99
MADE IN | China
EFFECTS | 55 including overdrive, reverb, delay, compression, limiter, wah; also features drum program
CONTROLS | Module select, value, play/stop drums/patch backward, bypass/patch forward, expression pedal
DIMENSIONS | 152mm (D) x 144mm (W) x 63mm (H)
WEIGHT | 380g without batteries
POWER SUPPLY | 9V adapter or 4 x AA batteries

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★☆☆☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★★☆

The world of effects pedals is saturated with so much good, bad, expensive, cheap and otherwise indifferent gear that it's tough to know where to go for the right bit of kit. One maxim that you would do well to stand by in order to make sense of the confusion is that you get what you pay for, and most of the time this useful yardstick holds true. An exception to this rule has come our way, however, in the form of these excellent Chinese-made pedals courtesy of the curiously-named Mooer brand. We can say without reservation that they punch above their weight, delivering more tone options per pound sterling than most FX units we've seen in some time.

The BEM Box, a mid-sized unit plus expression pedal, is one of those simple-looking gizmos that provides far more options beneath the bonnet than you'd expect on first whipping it out of its box, and in this case we'd advise you to read the manual *before* plugging in and experimenting – yes, we know this is heresy to any red-blooded bassist, ourselves included. However, a quick scan of the available options will save you much faffing about and wondering what the LED readout is actually trying to tell you.

The BEM Box offers fine-tunable options on overdrive, compression, wah, delay and reverb, plus combinations of all or some of those effects. You can save your own edited sounds or switch quickly through the bank of presets using the patch-forward and patch-backward switches. A drum program with tempo and independent controls allows you to jam along, and for a change the drums don't sound like five-dollar Casiotone clones recorded underwater: this option would enable you to create a full-band sound in a bass-plus-guitar duo, for example. We love this thing, with the one caveat that its construction doesn't look massively solid: we dread to think what would happen if some intoxicated stage invader wearing knee-high Dr Martens decided to take a flying leap onto it. Then again, for a mere £100 this is to be expected, so make sure you place the BEM Box out of harm's way. The brain beneath the silver exterior is too sophisticated to be exposed to drunk people (can you tell we speak from bitter experience here?).

At under £60, Mooer's fantastic little Sweeper envelope filter is one of the coolest bits of kit we've seen at the *BGM* command bunker in a while. The size of that chunk of Cheddar you snarfed down on Christmas Day, the Sweeper does its job amazingly well. The filter options include a satisfyingly wide frequency range for the price, a useful clean/fuzz switch and a sensitivity control, all of which combine to provide an overall feel of quality beyond its price point. It's built like a very little tank, too. Step on that, drunk stage-invader, and it will (probably) survive intact. Its weeny dimensions may cause it to get lost among the pile of cables and power supplies in your gig bag, though. Yes, we're serious. Keep an eye on it.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MOOER SWEEPER BASS FILTER PEDAL
PRICE | £59.99
MADE IN | China
EFFECTS | Envelope filter
CONTROLS|Clean/fuzz mode, range, resonance, intensity, bypass
DIMENSIONS | 93.5mm (D) x 42mm (W) x 52mm (H)
WEIGHT | 160g
POWER SUPPLY | 9V adapter

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★★☆

EHX AND DARKGLASS

EFFECTS

JOEL MCIVER GETS HIS SIZE 10 DOC MARTEN READY TO STOMP ON TWO LUXURIOUS EFFECTS PEDALS – ONE CLASSIC AND ONE NEW

EHX • Darkglass
www.ehx.com • www.darkglass.com

Electro-Harmonix's Big Muff is such a staple of the bassist's sonic armoury after all these years that it's hard to imagine how the unit can be significantly improved. This latest incarnation of the pedal responsible for a million overdriven tones is a work of art, though, offering all the range of sounds that bassists have been using since the 1970s plus a few welcome extra features. Prominent among these is the Gate control, a rotary noisegate that pulls off the rather unexpected trick of cutting down your signal chain's extraneous noise without detracting from your sustain or tone. The Crossover function has also evolved, allowing the user to apply filters to high and low frequencies, set a preferred tone and step away from it when needed. We also liked the -10db cut switch for anyone whose active pickups are just too damn hot, although this always strikes us as a bit like driving a car with the accelerator and the brake applied at the same time… anyway, we recommend the newest Big Muff unreservedly, especially as the thing is built like a tank and comes in at under a hundred quid.

A simpler, but pricier, companion to the Big Muff is the Darkglass Vintage Microtubes pedal. Darkglass is a relatively recent entrant into the bass effects market, but with several high-profile players giving their products the thumbs-up, it's time we paid them some attention. The Vintage Microtubes pedal is an eminently useful bit of kit, claiming not to emulate specific amp models, but rather to enable a gathering of era- or genre-specific tones that the user can then apply to a given scenario. Where the Microtubes excels is in a warm, 70s-sounding rock tone with plenty of crunch, but its wide range of options permits a clear, cutting profile all the way through to the 'full Lemmy'. Accompany it with a wah and you'll be most of the way to a 'Pulling Teeth'-era Cliff Burton, but this doesn't mean that it lacks subtlety: add a touch of effect to a mostly dry signal and it will merely lend you a touch of clarity. It's a solidly-made pedal, too, and the blue LED and silver case combination means that you might even be able to see the thing through all that dry ice that your singer insists on

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ELECTRO-HARMONIX DELUXE BASS BIG MUFF PI
PRICE | £90
CONTROLS | Volume, Blend, Tone, Sustain, Gate, Crossover HPF/LPF
POWER | Battery or external power
WEIGHT | 570g
DIMENSIONS | (H)40mm x (L)144mm x (W)118mm

DARKGLASS VINTAGE MICROTUBES
PRICE | £199
CONTROLS | Level, Blend, Drive, Era
POWER | External power
WEIGHT | 240g
DIMENSIONS | (H)36mm x (L)59mm x (W)112mm

BGM RATING

BASS BIG MUFF PI
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★★★★★☆
DARKGLASS VINTAGE MICROTUBES
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★★★☆☆☆

EDEN I-90

BASS CHORUS

SMALL BUT MIGHTY, EDEN'S LATEST CHORUS PACKS A FEISTY PUNCH, SAYS JOEL MCIVER

Eden
www.edenamps.com

We were big fans of Eden's bass preamp, the WTDI, when it landed on our desks for review, so we've been looking forward to their new I-90 chorus unit ever since Eden gave us the nod that it was on its way a while back. OK, we're suckers for gold bling...

Small but solid, the I-90 feels immediately as if you could stand an elephant on it (but don't try that at home) and it would still function. Sure, the on-off switch is weeny, so seven-foot bassists with size 18 boots may find it a little hard to find mid-solo, but that's a minor detail. The controls are heavy-duty and the labels readable, though, so have no fears about the gizmo's usability on stage.

To business. The four controls are pretty obvious, from left to right featuring Speed, Depth, Low Cut and Mix Level. The last of these is effectively the master blend, lifting and lowering the immediately identifiable swooshy chorus effect in and out of your dry sound, while Low Cut is a useful device which cuts the low end of the effect without cutting the bass signal. The fun stuff, of course, happens with the Speed and Depth controls, as anyone who spent their teenage years fiddling with any chorus you could name from the 70s and onward will tell you.

At full right, Speed (or low frequency oscillator rate) is hilarious, giving your tone that rapid, wibbly vibrato that will turn your audience's digestive systems to jelly if you play loud enough. At the opposite end the I-90 gives you a mysterious sweeping chorus that fretless and ERB bassists will love. Depth adjusts the intensity of the chorus effect itself, allowing you to add a tiny amount for extra resonance or the full measure for an otherworldly aura.

Now listen. There are lots of chorus pedals around: bass players are spoiled for choice. The Eden isn't the most sophisticated of the lot, but it's certainly the most robust we've seen for £100 plus change. Its effect isn't radically different to those of most of its competitors, but it does allow for subtlety and easy adjustment and as such, gets our thumbs up. Its USP is its solidity: if you're thinking of upgrading that nasty plastic chorus from the 80s, the I-90 might just be the right option.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £113.04 inc VAT
CONTROLS | Speed, Depth, Low Cut, Mix Level
MAX INPUT | 9.5dBV@500Hz
Speed | 0.5Hz to 8Hz
BLEND | Sweepable 30Hz to 10KHz
WEIGHT | 567g/1.25lb
POWER | AC

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Solidly built, heritage brand
MINUS | Other similar competitors exist
OVERALL | Definitely worth a try-out

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY 9/10
SOUND QUALITY 7/10
VALUE 8/10

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

SUPEREGO SYNTH ENGINE PEDAL

WANT TO SCARE PEOPLE WITH YOUR BASS? OF COURSE YOU DO. JOEL MCIVER ROAD-TESTS EHX'S NEW SUPEREGO SYNTH ENGINE AND TERRIFIES THE NEIGHBOURS

Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com

EHX's Superego Synth Engine pedal is a cunning combination of sampler and effects pedal that we don't pretend to understand, but which we do know sounds ace when you plug a bass guitar into one side and an amp into the other. What it basically does is capture your bass sound in one of three ways, repeat said sound as long as you like (from a second or two to indefinitely) and allow you to layer more sounds on top of it if you wish.

But, I hear you protest, this has all been done before: we've had loop pedals since the dawn of time (the 80s). True, true. The Superego doesn't pretend to be breaking new ground – but we haven't seen one as nifty as this for a while, and certainly not at this price. The cleverness in this case comes from its three user modes, triggered by the switch situated above the foot control. It has three modes, Latch, Momentary and Auto, although Momentary isn't actually marked on there for some arcane reason. In Latch mode, you play your desired note or chord for sampling, stamp on the footswitch and then do so again: you'll hear the bit of music you were playing with added sustain, infinitely so if you've got the Speed control set at full blast. Step on it again and add a new sound; release it, play something else, step on it again and add that sound to the mix; and so on and so on, until you end up with your desired potpourri of bass sounds. You can then solo over or under it as you choose.

In Momentary mode, the effect is only active as long as you depress the footswitch. This was particularly effective for key notes in a bass solo, we found: hit your note at the same time as the footswitch and it'll ring out with greater presence than otherwise.

Finally, you've got Auto mode, where you don't need to go near the footswitch after an initial tap: it'll keep adding whatever you play to the batch of sampled, sustained notes, as long as they're loud enough. At this point you can adjust the Speed control to your desired duration of sustain. Whack it over to full and you'll soon have a palette of sounds which, unless your choice of notes is harmonically perfect, will soon be overpowering: we found it worked best when set to halfway. The Gliss control comes into its own here, controlling the speed at which the chords or notes morph into each other.

The other controls are reasonably self-explanatory. Dry controls your unaltered bass sound: it sounds suitably ethereal when you turn it fully off, but then you won't be able to solo over your sampled sounds, so find a balance that works for the rig you're using and the environment you're in. Effect is the opposite of Dry, altering the volume of the sustained sounds. Note that in addition to the standard In and Out sockets, there's a Send and Return option, allowing you to set up an effects loop. There are real possibilities here. You could spend hours with this pedal. We did…

So what are the applications for bass, given that the Superego isn't a bass-only pedal? We started with a simple drone line and soloed over it, as the most obvious option. Then we created a three-part chord with separate samples and harmonised with that, amending the chord every few bars using the Latch function. Obviously it helps if you're playing relatively freeform music that will allow you to stretch out without worrying about time running out: that Pink Floyd or Hawkwind tribute band will welcome you and your Superego with open arms.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £149
BUIT IN | US
CONTROLS | Footswitch, three-position mode switch, Speed, Gliss, Dry and Effect controls
WEIGHT | 320g excluding battery
DIMENSIONS | 1187mm (L) x 93mm (W) x 36mm (D)

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Great for Pink Floyd impressions and horror soundtracks
MINUS | Accidentally single-tap or double-tap in the middle of your solo and you're screwed
OVERALL | Flexible and slightly sinister. What's not to like?

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	8/10
SOUND QUALITY	8/10
VALUE	8/10

New from electro-harmonix
Nano BIG MUFF π
hot tubes overdrive
EAST RIVER DRIVE
ehx crying bass
HOLY GRAIL MAX
Soul Food
ehx tortion JFET OVERDRIVE
EHX SLAMMI
POLYPHONIC PITCH SHIFTER / HARMONY PEDAL
Satisfaction FUZZ
GLOVE
LUMBERJACK log overdriver
WWW.EHX.COM

DIAMOND

BASS COMPRESSOR

MIKE BROOKS STOMPS ON TWO RED-HOT PEDALS. ARE THEY DIAMONDS, OR IS HE JUST OVER-XCITED?

Bass Gear
www.bassgear.co.uk

Compressors can be rather hit and miss for most of us low-enders: some players swear by them as they give them a smoother, even response, while others claim that a compressor simply robs their playing of dynamics and subtlety. No matter which side of the compression fence you sit, there's no denying just how many pedals and rack-mountable compressors there are out there. Occasionally, a role-specific pedal comes along that gets us all talking, though, and this offering from Canadian manufacturers Diamond may just be one such example.

A quick look at Diamond's website shows a fine selection of effects units: this particular pedal is a bass-specific version of the company's original optical compressor. Bassists were quick to point out the limitations of the original compressor when using active or extended-range instruments, so the company set about rectifying the issues and came up with this refined pedal. Utilising top-notch circuitry for improved signal headroom and low noise, the pedal comes with an 18V adapter and a simple but effective control layout.

Comp sets the compression threshold at which the effect comes into play, based on the level of the instrument signal; EQ is a 'tilt' style EQ control where a centre frequency is selected using the selector switch (250/900 Hz), and turning the control in either direction boosts either the low or high frequencies (left/right of the centre point) while reducing the level of the opposite frequencies; Volume adjusts the overall output of the affected signal. This last control allows the pedal to act as a signal booster for those occasions when the bass signal really needs to be pushed to the fore.

The simple design and layout makes it very easy to hear the effect that small adjustments have on your signal and tone and, to be honest, Diamond couldn't have made it any simpler. In practice, the pedal works well: sonically, it's very impressive. Some compressors have a reputation for being quite noisy, but this is where the quality of the construction and components makes a big difference, in comparison to other pedals already on the market. Despite having only three controls (OK, four with the switch), the player has a comprehensive range of settings to experiment with, as small adjustments seem have a large impact on the sound.

Fingerstyle lines sound tighter and fuller, without any loss of clarity in the top end, and a rich sustain seems to occur no matter what your playing style. However, it's the slappers among us, and those of a percussive persuasion, who can really benefit from this pedal, as it brings out all the high-end notes that can sometimes go amiss or sound smothered by the low-end performance of your instrument. Going from a clean signal without the pedal, to bringing the pedal into play, highlights what a dramatic change this pedal offers. The frequency options of the EQ control have been intelligently selected so that it's not simply a 'top and bottom' effect, but those ever-important mid-frequencies can also be tailored.

This really is a quality product, and it comes as no surprise that players of the calibre of Paul Turner are turning to it for inclusion in their FX set-up. At around the £150 mark it's not cheap, but its build quality and performance – not to mention a five-year guarantee – certainly make it worthy of consideration. Let your ears be the judge, but we were suitably impressed.

Switching to the Aphex Xciter, this offering from the US is ruggedly constructed, simple to use and intuitive: sonically it hits the bullseye. The metal casing is solidly put together, although the raised stomp button section and groove pattern make it look a little cheap, and despite the grooved controls being made of plastic, they feel sturdy and operate smoothly. The pedal can be powered by either an adapter (not included)

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

DIAMOND BASS COMPRESSOR
PRICE | £199
MADE IN | Canada
CONTROLS | Compression, EQ, EQ tilt point selector switch (250 / 900 Hz), volume
WEIGHT | 346g
DIMENSIONS | 117mm x 55mm x 98mm
POWER SUPPLY | 18V AC (UK plug adapter included, polarity reversing cable included for 9V use)

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A quality pedal that really hits the mark. Solidly built and simple to use
MINUS | Some players might want to have a few more controllable settings, and it's not cheap
OVERALL | A fine piece of kit that delivers an impressive performance

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

APHEX BASS

AURAL XCITER

MSL Professional
www.mslprofessional.co.uk

or a 9V battery, which is accessed via an easy-access plastic cover on the underside. Quarter-inch input/output jack sockets on either side are accompanied by a balanced DI socket on the rear, that also offers phantom power should your mixer offer that as an option.

An exciter is supposed to add depth and tightness to your tone while bringing harmonics and a degree of clarity to the fore, so the controls on offer are no surprise. The low frequency selector offers a range between 80 and 250Hz while the high frequencies range from 700Hz to 7kHz: both boost controls range from 1-10. The Harmonics control pinpoints a specific type of harmonic character to be affected by the controls, but despite being labelled Acoustic Guitar/Bass/Electric Guitar, don't be fooled into thinking the Bass setting is the only useful one to us bassmeisters, as the other two settings throw up some interesting results.

Tested with several different basses, the results were equally impressive despite the different tonal characteristics of each instrument. Using a couple of active basses that have flexible EQ systems, the pedal beefed up the underlying bass response while smoothing out the top end. Interestingly, although there is no mid-frequency control, you can affect the low and high-midrange by turning the lo-frequency control up to full, the hi-frequency control to its minimum setting and then adjusting the boost controls as required until you find a sweet spot.

Using the pedal with a passive Precision, the natural tone was drastically improved and offered the player a very distinct change from the natural tone and signal. The midrange bark was tightened up in a positive way while the top and bottom sounded almost supercharged, giving the Precision a modern tone while retaining its classic characteristics. The low end sounded smooth and subtle, with a greater degree of note articulation. Slap players will certainly find a use for this pedal on their pedalboards, as it manages to raise the low frequencies without necessarily raising the signal level, making slaps and thumps sound more transparent and focused while D and G-string plucks have greater warmth.

Switching between the vanilla signal of each bass and the affected signal, the differences were quite startling as it radically improves the sonic detail of your playing. Be in no doubt, this pedal may well offer a sonic nirvana for players looking for that missing something in their tone. Actually, it's so effective and sounds so good, that you may find yourself unable to turn it off. Some players might look at the pricetag and think that it's quite a lot of money for a tone shaping pedal – but we reckon it could be a very worthy investment indeed.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

APHEX BASS AURAL XCITER
PRICE | £154
MADE IN | USA
CONTROLS | Lo-frequency boost, lo-frequency selector, harmonics (instrument selector), hi-frequency boost, hi-frequency selector, ground lift
WEIGHT | 594g
DIMENSIONS | 165mm x 62mm x 122mm
POWER SUPPLY | 9V AC (UK plug adapter not included)

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A strong performer that really gives your signal a real kick in the pants
MINUS | The price might put some players off, but it does what it says
OVERAL | Difficult to fault: this pedal is really worth a try. Highly recommended

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★☆☆☆

EBS

BILLY SHEEHAN SIGNATURE DRIVE PEDAL

'DRIVE LIKE THE WIND, BILLY!' SAYS MIKE BROOKS OF SHEEHAN'S ACE NEW STOMPBOX

EBS
www.ebssweden.com ● www.soundtech.co.uk

The quest for the ideal distorted bass tone may well be over; power, clarity and brute force in a box. Read on!

Whether you're a fan of Billy Sheehan's playing or not, his main playing tones are instantly recognisable: for years, his distorted tones have come courtesy of preamps designed by Dan Pearce back in Buffalo, New York. The fact that said preamps sell for astronomical figures on the second-hand market reveals the demand for them among bassists. Although his new EBS unit is not a direct copy of those preamps, the Signature Drive is obviously close enough in terms of performance, functionality and tonal delivery for Billy to be happy with it.

EBS's build quality is still second to none, and as a signature pedal (much like the Stanley Clarke Wah pedal), it comes in a custom colour finish, in this case purple. The layout is efficiently simple, with five controls on the front plate: Drive (sets the amount of gain/drive, becoming grittier the more you add), Tone (determines a low to high midrange scoop), Level (sets the level of the driven signal before compression), Clean (sets the level for the clean signal before compression) and Compression (switchable between off, mid (+3dB gain) and high (+6dB gain)). Two additional trim controls reside on the circuit board which can be adjusted with a small Phillips screwdriver: these set the threshold level for compression, and the amount of compression added to the Mid setting.

The inclusion of Loop paths for both the Clean and Drive signals allows the player to add any further effect or processing units to their signal chain in order to fine-tune their overall sound. Some players might think this is over-egging the pudding, but considering the effort to which some players have gone to replicate Billy's sound, and a look at Billy's rack during Mr Big's heyday, this box is doing its utmost to replicate the Sheehan sound in as uncomplicated a fashion as possible.

> "QUITE POSSIBLY THE BEST BASS DISTORTION PEDAL ON THE MARKET"

Down to business… Using a couple of different basses and a standard 4x10 cab set-up, EBS should be congratulated on producing a plug-and-play unit that delivers on its promise. Bass distortion has always been a frequency-sapper, but the ability to keep the clean signal to maintain a decent level of bottom end is the winning factor. The distortion itself is outstanding for an effects unit without any tubes in place, and the compression is truly the icing on the cake, offering two distinctive settings for those who need even more projection to cut through, whether playing down and dirty holding the band together or soloing up the dusty end of the neck.

Moving over to a Yamaha Attitude bass and a two amp/two cab set-up to try and replicate Mr Sheehan a little further, there is no doubt that Billy's set-up and signal chain is what it is – but the EBS unit takes that and wraps a big snarling purple bow around it. Had EBS brought this pedal to market when Billy was riding the David Lee Roth/Mr Big wave of popularity in the early 90s, they would have shifted these pedals by the warehouse-load and many a player could have recreated the sounds they were hearing on record and live. Twenty-odd years later, it's finally here and it was truly worth the wait. Enjoy.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £179
MADE IN | China
CONTROLS | Drive, Tone, Level, Clean, Compression (off, mid, high), Threshold and Compression trim dials (under back plate)
WEIGHT | 480 grams
DIMENSIONS | 115mm x 90mm x 35mm
Power supply|9V AC (UK plug adaptor not included)

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Quite possibly the best bass distortion pedal on the market. Top quality, strong performance, intuitive and flexible. Don't be put off by its rock connotations, many a player could benefit by adding this to their FX arsenal
MINUS | It's not cheap but you get what you pay for, it really does deliver great bass distortion.
OVERAL | |Highly recommended, other pedal manufacturers will have to go some way to beat this. Billy and EBS have come up with the goods

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★★★★☆☆

The EBS Billy Sheehan Signature Drive pedal is the result of collaboration between EBS Professional Bass Equipment and legendary bass player Billy Sheehan. It is based on his concept of mixing together a clean signal with a distorted to be able to preserve low frequencies and find balance between distortion and definition.

The unique feature of including a *Clean* and a *Drive Loop* offers unlimited pre-post mix tone shaping possibilities. Just insert any other device you'd like within each loop to 'pimp' the effect into your own signature drive!

LIKE EBS!

www.facebook.com/ebssweden

Professional Bass Equipment

EBS®

ebssweden.com/ebsblog

sound TECHNOLOGY Distributed in in the UK and Eire by Sound Technology Ltd | 01462 480000 | www.soundtech.co.uk | info@soundtech.co.uk

WWW.EBSSWEDEN.COM

ROGER MAYER

VOODOO BASS EFFECTS

ROGER MAYER, CREATOR OF EFFECTS PEDALS FOR JIMI HENDRIX AND OTHERS, ISSUES TWO NEW BASS PRODUCTS. JOEL MCIVER GOES ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER...

Roger Mayer Electronic Design Associates
info@roger-mayer.co.uk www.roger-mayer.co.uk

Effects pedals don't all have to look the same, even today when there are over seven billion different stomp-boxes on the market and they all make approximately the same noise. There's still room for heritage manufacturers to do good business with high-quality products, as proven by the success of Roger Mayer, original effects designer for Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley and many other legendary artists.

Mayer's Voodoo range of effects for bass has been around for a while now, but the streamlined TC version of the range is relatively new. These two overdrive pedals, the Voodoo Bass and the Voodoo Bass 2, perform effectively the same function, except that the 2 is designed for the frequency range of a 5-string or other extended-range instrument, coping with the expected lower tones. The controls on the two pedals are identical, so let's treat them as one for the purposes of this review.

Mayer tells us that the Voodoo TC pedals have been designed specifically to fit into the confined space of a pedalboard, hence their relatively weeny dimensions of only 70mm in width. This also explains the absence of a power supply when you buy the pedal, a detail that I was fully prepared to whinge about in this review until Mayer correctly pointed out that he sells these pedals

to 20 different countries and that it's not logistically sensible to stock a different power supply for each one. You'll need to spend another fiver on a power supply, then, or the usual bunch of batteries. However, note that the Voodoo pedals don't pander to our modern attention deficit by including a quick-access battery compartment, and you'll need to remove four screws to get to it. This two-minute operation won't make you look good when the crowd are waiting impatiently for your solo. So get a power supply, eh?

Operating the pedals is simplicity itself. There's a large plastic rotary control which applies overdrive to your signal, from fully off at left to fully on at right, plus two curious-looking but easily operable plastic-sheathed controls which handle the self-explanatory level and tone. These latter two may look innocuous, but their range is surprisingly wide, so handle them with care – especially if you've whacked the overdrive on full.

Now, that big, grey rotary control is designed to be operated by foot as well as hand, thus saving you many a bout of sciatica from endless bending over. You'll be fine operating it if you're wearing trainers or other footwear with a grippy sole. However, as a professional pessimist and nitpicker, I called Mayer before writing this review and asked him if he thought its surface might not be friction-heavy enough for bassists wearing brogues, sandals or high heels (hey, whatever turns you on) or indeed playing in bare feet. What happens if the soles of your shoes (or feet) are wet because you've spilled your pint on the stage, or more likely because someone has spilled/thrown theirs all over you? What happens if you're at a festival and covered in what you hope is mud? And, regardless of what you have on your feet, what if it's pitch

"THE VOODOOS DO EXACTLY WHAT THEY CLAIM TO DO… TURNING LOWER FREQUENCIES INTO A BIG, BASS-HEAVY ASSAULT"

black, your contact lens has abandoned ship and you've left your glasses at home?

Mayer thought these scenarios unlikely – and he's absolutely right – but the image of that master control being a bit too slippery to turn (or invisible in the absence of a display) is still bugging me a bit.

All right, let's move on. Listen to the amazing sounds made by the Voodoos. For me at least, there is no arguing: they both deliver a phenomenal number of tones, from a subtle growl to the most unforgiving of distortions. While the main control is obviously the one you'll have most fun with here, that little tone button is a particular monster, ranging from a dark, muffled overdrive from hell to an ear-bleeding, top-heavy shriek, which will be perfect for irritating your grandmother when she's watering the begonias outside your rehearsal studio. There's something very vintage in the sound: although you won't sound like Hendrix for obvious reasons, there's a hell of a warmth and smoothness in the overdrive that evokes the smell of patchouli and 'jazz cigarettes'. How do we know what they smell like? Er… a friend described them to us once.

Refreshingly, the Voodoos do exactly what they claim to do when it comes to bass, hanging on to the lower frequencies, sticking a red-hot pitchfork in them (excuse the metaphors, it's been a long day) and turning them into a big, bass-heavy assault. It's not all about aural extremes, though: roll off all three controls a little – OK, a lot – and you'll enter more subtle territory, a place where you can fuzz out without getting in the way of the rest of the band and where chordal lines and a touch of judicious soloing is in order. Go back down even closer to a fully dry signal and you'll be left with just a touch of crunch, perfect for grunge parts or thickening up a guitar riff when playing in unison. Don't forget to twiddle your bass and amp EQ as well: you may find that the perfect overdriven tone is right there at the flick of a pickup selector.

Sure, there are alternatives to the Mayer range: we're thinking in particular of Aguilar's excellent Agro overdrive, which delivers a lesser (but still admirable) range of tones for approximately half the price of a Voodoo. However, you're buying British when you buy a Mayer pedal, which is not supposed to sound like some pointless, jingoistic statement, but a genuine point about the innovation and heritage of our electronics industry. You're also paying for quality here: these pedals are truly built to stand the rigours and requirements of stage use. Finally, how often do you get to play gear made by the bloke who shaped Jimi Hendrix's sound?

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £230 each
MADE IN | UK
CONTROLS | Hand/foot-operated rotary control, on-off footswitch, tone, level
POWER REQUIREMENTS | 9V battery or external adapter (not supplied)
WEIGHT | 275g including battery
DIMENSIONS | 115mm length x 70mm width x 55mm depth

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Amazing sounds and build quality
MINUS | Slippery-soled or short-sighted bassists may have problems with the rotary control; relatively slow battery change
OVERALL | A pair of handmade, tonally rich beauties that will last you a lifetime

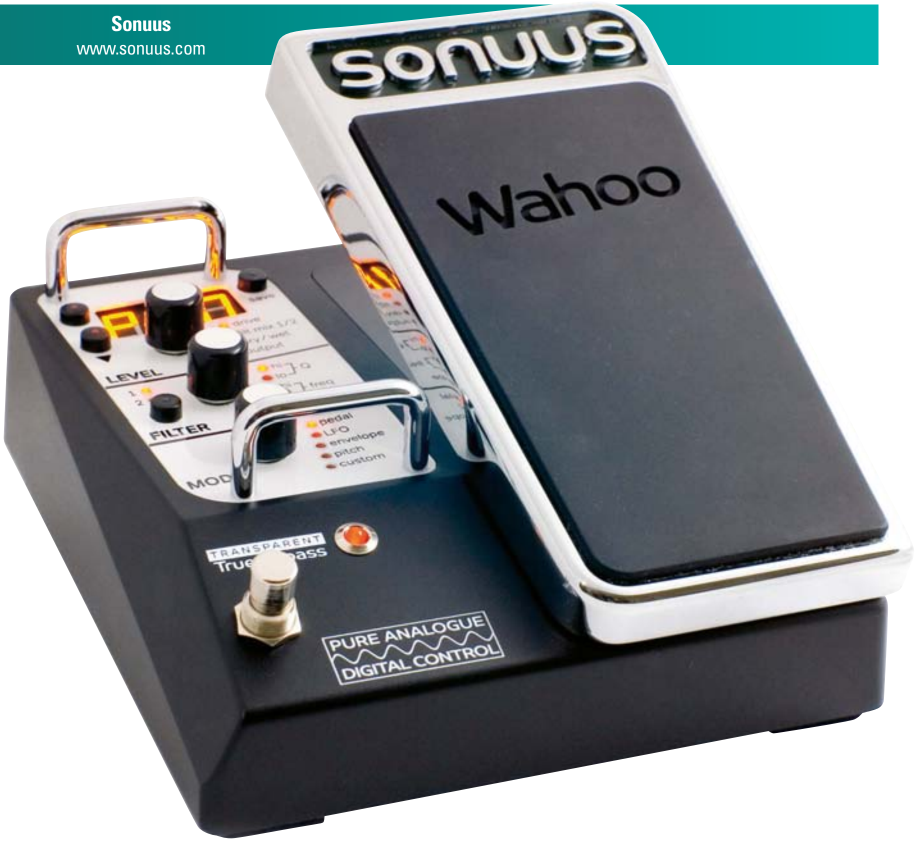
BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

SONUUS
WAHOO

CAN WE GET A WAHOO FOR A PEDAL THAT PROVIDES A GALAXY OF TONE OPTIONS. JOEL MCIVER SETS PHASERS TO STUN

Sonuus
www.sonuus.com



Remember the old days, when you got your first effects pedals? Depending on your age, you either had a feather cut, a mullet or a mohawk, but – regardless of vintage – you definitely had a poor complexion and no money. Cheap pedals were the order of the day, bought from dealers (for the over-40s) or eBay (under-30s) or nicked from the guitarist in your band (everyone).

Nowadays there are still hundreds of crappy, plasticky effects pedals available for next to nothing, the difference being that world-class tones are now relatively affordable. You can get them for the price of a curry for your band, plus an MOT for your van.

The Sonuus Wahoo, an analogue filter and wah pedal that looks visually complex, but is actually reasonably easy to figure out, and offers an array of tone options. This British manufacturer reckons that you should splash out 250 notes plus postage on a Wahoo for two reasons. One, it offers a customisable tone interface with more options than any other standalone pedal at this price point. Two, it has sound shaping choices that are entirely new. We'd add a third advantage: the Wahoo is built like a tank.

Let's look at the sound from the ground up. Like those menus at Harvester which guide diners of low IQ through the food options with handy arrows – choose your meat, then choose your sauce, then choose your vegetables and you're done (sorry, it's lunchtime as I write this) – the Wahoo takes you from Mode options (Pedal, LFO, Envelope, Pitch and Custom) via Filter (Hi Q, Lo Q, Hi Freq, Lo Freq, Shape) to Level (Drive, Filt Mix ½, Dry/Wet and Output). It has a three-digit LED display, navigated by up and down buttons, plus a Save control for custom options. There's also a bypass footswitch, and a lock slider to stop drunk people in the front row dicking about with your tone 'for a laugh'.

So what does all this stuff do in reality? Set Mode to Pedal if you want to rock up and down on the wah pedal like Jimi Hendrix, or to LFO for autowah. Envelope gets you an envelope filter (well, duh) and Pitch allows you one of two options – Track, where the wah cleverly follows the dominant frequency of whatever you're playing (whether it's that single-note line from Simple Minds' 'Waterfront' or a 10-finger tapped adaption of a Rachmaninov symphony), or Bend, which follows the degree of string-bending. This last one is great because you don't need to synchronise the peak of the wah with the action of your fingers.

Cleverly, the Wahoo has two analogue filters, which Sonuus claims create realistic vowel sounds and a more authentic 70s filter tone. Now, these claims depend on the user's ears and record collection, so we can't substantiate them for everyone – but we can say with confidence that the clear, expressive sounds on offer are astoundingly good.

The range of tones is extended by the Drive option (useful for soloing) and a mixer, which permits the blend of dry/wet signals that you prefer. Furthermore, you can set the high and low points of the Q (peakiness) of the filter, the filter cutoff frequencies, the distance the pedal travels before it hits the sweet spot (good for tired ankles), and – get this – each and every one of no fewer than 100 present sounds.

It's rather a lot of options for one smallish box, and indeed, the more you learn about the Wahoo, the more you realise that £262 isn't that much after all. And this is before we even get to the software, accessible via a USB cable; the battery life percentage display; the autoswitch to bypass mode if power fails; and the silent-switching circuit. Our only whinge is that it doesn't come with a power cable. Ah well, get one off Amazon for a fiver…

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Insane levels of tone customising
MINUS | Insane levels of tone customising… and no power cable
OVERALL | The most advanced filter/wah pedal for this price in ages

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★★★☆☆

CORNELL

PEDALAMP

SMALL AND DISCREET IT MAY NOT BE, BUT THE CORNELL PEDALAMP POSITIVELY REEKS OF QUALITY. MIKE BROOKS SALUTES THIS LATEST PIECE OF UK-BUILT VALVE ENGINEERING

Strings And Things
www.stringsandthings.co.uk

In this day and age, when effect pedals for bassists are almost limitless and almost every price range is covered, it's somewhat surprising to receive this boutique piece of hardware – which, although not purpose-built for warriors of the low end, is equally applicable to bass duties as to our guitar-slinging cousins. When it comes to distortion and harmonically rich colouration of your tone, there is no substitute for valve technology, plain and simple. The Cornell PowerAmp is not your off-the-shelf, mass produced stompbox, but instead a meticulously designed piece of craftsmanship incorporating two 12AX7 (ECC83) pre-amp valves and a single EL84 power valve alongside mains and output transformers on the outer chassis.

First impressions are that this is a ruggedly assembled piece of kit. Picking the unit up, you soon realise how weighty it is, and were you to incorporate this into a pedalboard, you would want to ensure you placed it in the line of attack correctly at the first time of asking. The front carry handle, polished metal chassis and 'chicken-head' controls give this a very solid look and feel: the controls all turn very smoothly and the stomp buttons offer a reassuring click. The PedalAmp is marketed as having a variety of uses: as a pedal, as a pre-amp for recording and as an amp in its own right. But don't be fooled into thinking you could use this unit for running your whole bass rig on a gig, as it only provides 4 watts of tube-driven output power to an 8-ohm speaker.

With its variety of potential uses and applications, it is reassuring to see that a number of outputs have been provided in addition to the main controls, making the PedalAmp as versatile as possible. With the pre-requisite input and output sockets on either side of the unit, the desk output can be used for connection to an external mixer (ie for recording or PA reinforcement purposes) while the rear of the unit houses speaker and headphone outputs (for private practice). The mains socket and power button are followed by two 9-volt DC outputs, should you wish to utilise the pedal's power to fuel additional pedals. Although the output and mains transformers detract from the appearance of the pedal, they physically need to be there and the placement of the valves on top means that they are cooled and protected by a vented casing – so there is no reason why they should be damaged by knocks and scrapes in a live setting, and they should be well-ventilated, therefore preventing any overheating.

SANDBERG
...always by your side
Synergy
Synergy Distribution, PO BOX 10422, Tamworth, B77 1WE
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £690
MADE IN | UK
FEATURES | Gain, bass, treble, balance in/balance out, master output, boost, bypass
DIMENSIONS | 167 x 290 x 137mm
Weight 3.6kg

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Solidly constructed and well thought out, it certainly looks the part and delivers valve distortion in spades
MINUS | Very expensive, not bass-specific and there should be a carry case for this price
OVERALL | If genuine valve distortion is your thing, the PedalAmp is well worth checking out – and you get what you pay for

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	10/10 stars
SOUND QUALITY	8/10 stars
VALUE	7/10 stars

"A METICULOUSLY DESIGNED PIECE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP..."

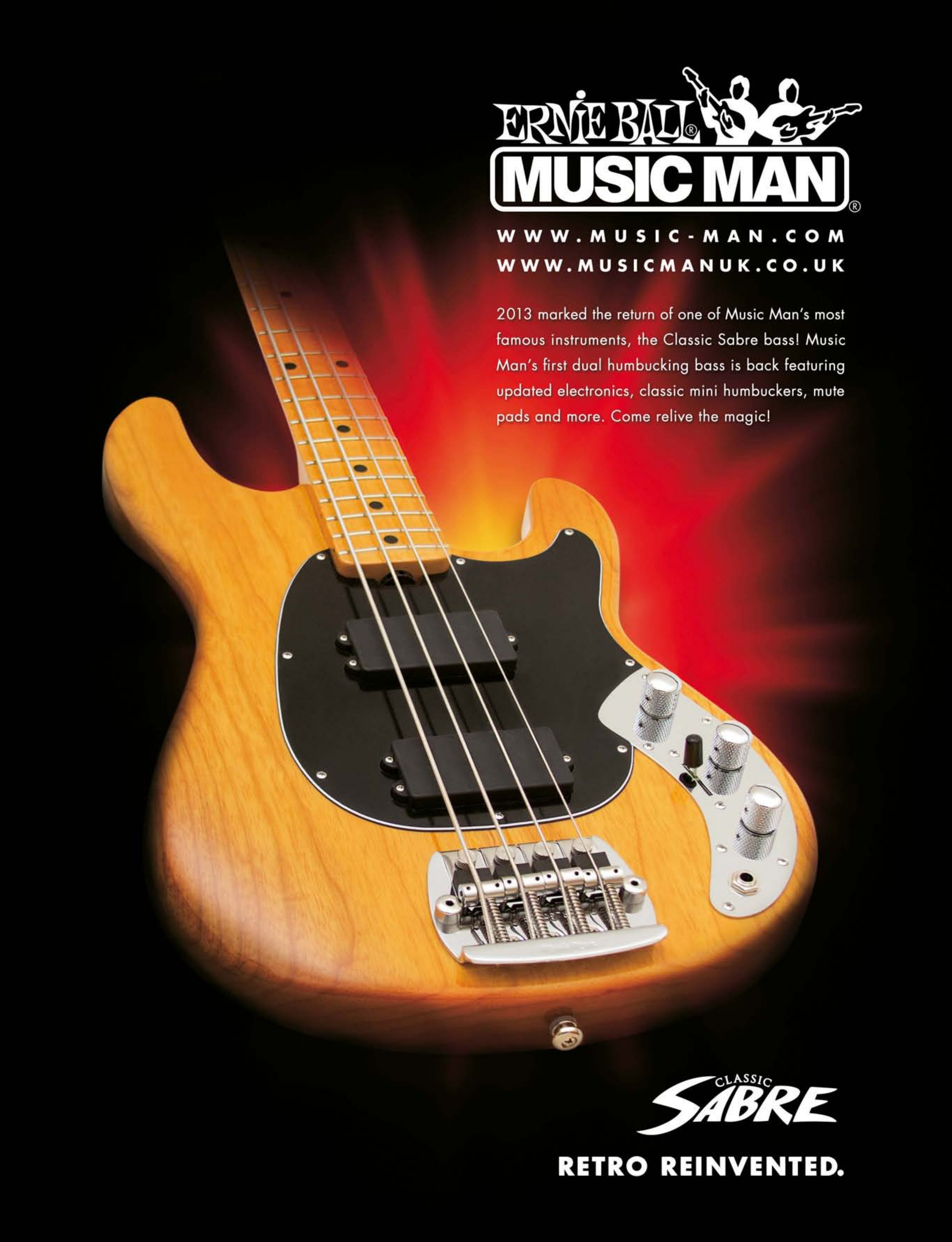
In terms of control layout, it couldn't be any simpler, with controls for Gain, Bass, Treble, Master Output and Balance In/Out and two stomp buttons for Boost and Bypass. The Gain control dictates the volume of the pre-amp and the resulting level of distortion coming from the 12AX7 valves. The Bass and Treble controls affect the amount of low and high frequency boost to the signal, and the Master Output controls the volume level to all outputs from the pedal: it also works with the Gain control in adjusting the overall level of distortion. The Balance In/Out switch keeps the pre-amp and output voltage equal, which in turn affects the output distortion and helps to maintain a clean signal if required. The Boost switch increases the gain but has a pre-determined tone, thus rendering the tone controls ineffective, while the Bypass switch has a dual purpose in taking a clean signal from the pedal or, if not connected to an amp, acting as a mute switch.

As with any pedal, experimentation is the name of the game, and the PedalAmp is no different in that respect. Distortion is very much a matter of taste and often requires quite a bit of tweaking to hit the sweet spot, but built as it is with the finest of components, the PedalAmp makes the job an intuitive experience. With only a few controls to play with, in theory it should be a case of finding a tone you like with the tone controls, adjusting the Gain to dial in the required amount of distortion before applying the Output level, and adjusting the Gain and Output controls to fine-tune the desired signal.

We used the PedalAmp in both home and live settings and were pleasantly surprised by how good the settings at home translated into a live gig situation. Plugging in, an initial period of silence as the valves warm up is followed by a warm but lively signal, and setting the tone controls to 50 per cent, the bass tone was very useable – although we did notice that passive basses certainly sounded warmer, as you would expect. To keep things simple, the active basses were kept to one side, not wishing to complicate matters with bass EQ circuitry. Although this unit isn't specifically designed for bass, it certainly gives a good account of itself and conveys a thickly-coloured bass signal. Selecting the Bypass option gave a clear indication of the differences between the natural clean signal and the overall tone provided by the pedal, and there was no disputing the warm, bell-like tone provided by the valves: the overall sound is colourful and alive. The initial rasp when attacking the strings adds real character to your tone, and digging into your favourite bass-lines highlights how a different playing approach can shed new light on a part you know well.

The Boost option takes away some of the bottom end, producing a honky, nasal tone, which is useful if a little extra clarity is required for tapping, percussive styles or screaming pinch harmonics à la Billy Sheehan. Switching the Balance control to Out also altered the sound by adding more presence and attack: the level of background noise also increased, but this was not a major issue. If you're a bass player whose sound revolves around distortion, this pedal could well open up several new possibilities in terms of how you record or even play live, especially if you are thinking of ditching a sizeable live rig for in-ear monitoring, as the tube performance from this pedal is quite something.

Boutique hand-assembled equipment usually carries an equally boutique price-tag, and the Cornell PedalAmp is no exception. At a little under £700, this is a serious investment and some may question spending that sort of money on a pedal that may have limited use, particularly if distortion is an effect you use sparingly. On the other hand, tone freaks out there who are always looking for the pinnacle of tone and will spend big bucks to get it may see this as a wise investment. Bear in mind that this isn't a bass-specific unit – although we hear that a bass-friendly version is very much on the cards, so why not try one out, see if it works for you and if not, compare it with the bass version when it arrives?


ERNIE BALL®
MUSIC MAN®
WWW.MUSIC-MAN.COM
WWW.MUSICMANUK.CO.UK
2013 marked the return of one of Music Man's most famous instruments, the Classic Sabre bass! Music Man's first dual humbucking bass is back featuring updated electronics, classic mini humbuckers, mute pads and more. Come relive the magic!
CLASSIC SABRE
RETRO REINVENTED.

GREATNESS COMES IN ALL SIZES

The new BG combo series builds on our smash success - the BG250 - and pairs ultra-lightweight design with pure playability. In addition to the 250 watts of raw power hailing from the original BG250, we've added a brilliant feature set, multiple speaker configurations and an intelligent EQ section. Rounding out the list of onboard goodies is a built-in tuner and TonePrint functionality. Oh, and did we mention they sound absolutely killer?

TonePrint® Artists

TonePrint® App

Available on the App Store

Android App on Google play

tcelectronic.com/bg250-family

tc electronic®

Life At The Low End

EVERY MONTH *BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE* DELIVERS YOU IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH THE WORLD'S BEST BASS PLAYERS. BEHOLD THE CREAM OF THE CROP!

Here at *Bass Guitar Magazine* we have the utter luxury of meeting the world's most accomplished bass players. What's more, they let us ask them highly personal questions about their gear and technique without swearing at us. That's not because of our natural, unaffected charm – much as we wish it were – it's because bass players know that in this country, there's only one print publication devoted to bass, and you're holding it.

We meet dozens of bassists every month, and sadly we can't fit all of these talented folks into *The Ultimate Bass Guide*, so we've chosen a few of our favourites to entertain you. The aim is to be as informative as possible about the various careers available to you as a bass player, so we've featured Yolanda Charles, a prolific session bassist and composer in her own right; Peter Hook, who earned his stripes the old way with the legendary bands Joy Division and New Order; Tom Hamilton of Aerosmith, who plays stadiums (what more do you need to know?); and others including the great, great Larry Graham, who is responsible for originating the slap bass style. Talking of which, Mark King is in here too, just as he deserves to be. What are you waiting for?

"MOST ARTISTS DON'T WANT ME TO BRING MUCH SOUL OR FUNK TECHNIQUE INTO THEIR MUSIC. THEY DON'T WANT POPS OR GRACE NOTES OR DEAD NOTES OR ANY OF THAT BUSINESS"

HIGH PRIESTESS OF FUNK

YOLANDA CHARLES HAS SLAPPED THE BASS ON SEVERAL CONTINENTS, PLAYED THE WORLD'S BIGGEST VENUES, AND HAS YOUR FAVOURITE ROCK STAR'S NUMBER ON SPEED DIAL. JOEL MCIVER GETS THE INSIDE STORY ON STAGE NERVES, DOWNWARDLY MOBILE THUMBS, AND GETTING A TELLING-OFF FROM THE MODFATHER . . .

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TINA K

If anyone epitomises the modern bassist more than Yolanda Charles, we'd like to meet 'em. The modern world requires versatility from all of us, and few musicians have this quality more than this softly-spoken Londoner, whose diary includes live and studio dates with a whole range of musos, but who still finds the time to run no fewer than four bands and a record label called Groove4Dayz – as well as spending quality time with her three kids. That's modern life in a nutshell, and along the way Yolanda has learned some valuable lessons. One important trick is when to bring the funk, and when to leave it at home.

"I remember when I played with Paul Weller," she begins, "who wanted me to play his music, but with my particular feel. Occasionally I'd get my backside kicked for playing too much! Most artists don't want me to bring much soul or funk technique into their music. They don't want pops or grace notes or dead notes or any of that business, but they do want some elements of my feel, just to make it swing slightly. It's all about finding the right balance, so you're not in their face with the wrong approach, but you still bring your personality to it."

Want some more advice? By and large, most musical directors (the people who pay you when you're a session musician, and who are therefore the people you need to get on with if you're interested in paying off your mortgage sometime) don't have the time to lay down the law. "You're expected to play it right," she tells us. "You learn the music, you play it, and if you get any complaints from the MD, you adjust accordingly. Sometimes there can be room for a bit of a jam, though: when I played with Roddy Frame, which was after Paul Weller, we did a fair bit of jamming."

Yolanda's recent gigs sum up her daily schedule, fulfilling as she does one of several different roles. "I recently worked with Dave Stewart, and I also did two one-off gigs for charity that were to do with Michelle Obama, around the time of the Olympics. I was the musical director of that band, which was really cool. As well as all that I was moving house, so that was a bit of a crazy period, but it went really well: it was pretty exciting, given the speed that everything happened. Perhaps it was a little too fast on that occasion: I only had two days with the full band and we had to get through something like 25 songs. Things kept changing the whole time, with artists coming and going, which made it a little bit tricky, and also we learned way more stuff than we needed to."

She adds: "I had a really fabulous band, though, which made it easy. Pretty much everyone from that band had a jazz background of some kind, so they knew about improvisation and quick thinking, and also playing in any style that was required. They could handle anything. Dave's stuff is eclectic, from the Eurythmics catalogue to his more recent stuff. They made me look great!"

If you've ever wondered how session bassists cope with the endless array of songs and bass parts that they have to know, let alone how they get up and play the stuff without errors, it turns out that even seasoned professionals run out of brain-space eventually. As Yolanda says, "I make sure that on the day of a gig, all the arrangements are under my fingers, but when I finish playing the set, it just goes. I don't retain anything in my mind afterwards if I don't need it any more, because I'm learning so much stuff all the time. I know some musicians, especially keyboard players for some reason, who seem to have a permanent catalogue embedded in their brain. Someone will play a motif from a song and the keyboard player will join in and play the entire track. I'm really jealous of that, because even with my own music, I have to refresh my memory, especially when I'm singing and playing. I can't just pick the bass up and play instantly. There's a couple of songs I can do, but most of the time I have to re-practise it."

Perhaps certain musical genres are easier to learn and replicate than others? "Obviously if there's a specific bass-line

"I HAVE AN AMAZING LEVINSON BLADE. I ALSO PLAY A FENDER JAZZ 65, WHICH IS LOVELY BUT I DON'T USE IT SO MUCH THESE DAYS. I PLAY A FIVE -STRING MORE OFTEN BY CHOICE BECAUSE I LOVE HAVING THE RANGE"

in a song, it's much easier to remember: that happens more in pop or rock stuff. Often, though, it's the top-line melody that you have to remember. If there's no bass shape as such, it's a matter of remembering the chords, and if the chords are pretty much the same – for example, a common sequence like G, Em, A, B – you actually have to remember the melody more than the bass part."

Lately Yolanda has been focusing on her own band, The Deep Mo, whose excellent new album *Funk From The 3rd Quarter* was reviewed favourably in a previous issue. She's also been digging deep into the classic canon of music, she explains. "I've started playing more soul and pop covers lately, which I've never really done before: I've always been more focused on the music of the band of whoever hired me at the time. Because I spent so much time doing that, I wasn't really learning the classic pop and soul funk stuff that you hear party bands playing. I did some of it when I was in my late teens and early 20s, but then I started getting some really good session work and stopped doing the party band stuff. It was fantastic for learning about harmony, though: it's a brilliant school to learn how to play pretty much anything, in any style. You stretch yourself when you're learning material written by someone else; that's what I've gone back to recently."

Yolanda's solo career isn't actually solo as such: her band features varying line-ups depending on the gig. "I've got a solo set, a duo set, a trio set, a quintet set and a 10-piece set – when the budget allows!" she chuckles. "The five-piece band always have an hour's set under their fingers. The 10-piece band basically just add two backing singers and a three-piece horn section. It isn't difficult to add them on to the five-piece, which is my ideal line-up."

Gear-wise, Yolanda has a range of modern classics in her armoury. "I was with Mesa/Boogie for a number of years," she explains, "and I wanted to try something else, although I loved Mesa/Boogie and I always will. I tried everything, pretty much, and eventually I went with Aguilar amps, which have a lot of power. They have that midrange punch and bottom end clarity, which is brilliant. If you want a different kind of sound, though, a different amp might be the brand for you: these manufacturers are all at such a high standard nowadays that you'll pretty much always get a really amazing amp beyond a certain price point, and then it's just a matter of fine-tuning the sound that you require. The Aguilar team are also really helpful; they give me amazing tour support. Any country that I go to, they can get my rig out there, which is great because I don't have to ship my stuff everywhere. It's terrible when you appear on TV somewhere and the rig you're using has gaffa tape over the brand name."

Basses? "I have an amazing Levinson Blade. I also play a Fender Jazz 65, which is lovely but I don't use it so much these days. I play a five-string more often by choice because I love having the range. It's great to have that low Eb. I tried various things before I switched to a five, like tuning the E string on my four down to D, and tuning the whole bass down and having it set up again. Neither of those things worked out for me, so I'm using a five-string. I'm not that comfortable slapping on it, though, so I use a four-string for my own gigs."

As for effects: "I love my EBS wah. It's the funkiest thing ever if you use it while you're ghosting, and doubling up where a drummer would play grace notes on a snare. It locks up like a dream. It's great if you find a drummer who does that too"

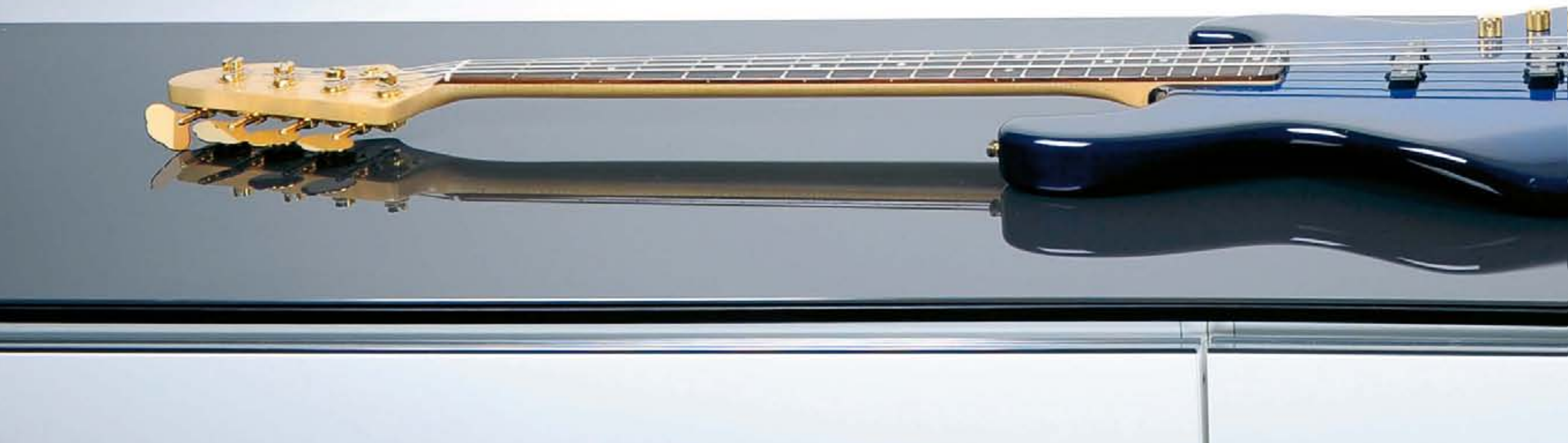
All this notwithstanding, she's still searching for the perfect set-up, in particular when it comes to that often-overlooked area of stagecraft: monitoring. "I'm not a fan of in-ears for bass playing," she says. "People tell me to try this and to try that, and I know you can get them with multiple drivers and so on, but ultimately I've got a great rig and I'm not going to hear that sound through in-ears. You've also got to rely on the sound guy to deliver the right mix into them. I'd be interested to know what other bass players do for monitoring." Answers on a postcard please, and we'll pass them on.

Yolanda's bass style continues to evolve, she says. "I've changed my slap technique recently. I've been thumbs down for most of my career, but I've started playing thumbs up because I feel there's more control that way. You've got the

THE CV

Just some of the many artists and bands with whom Yolanda has shared a stage…

Jimmy Somerville
Raw Stylus
Paul Weller
Marcella Detroit
Howard New
Pops Mohammed
Alison Moyet
Desert Eagle Discs
Gabrielle
Robbie Williams
BB King album sessions with Eric Clapton, Roger Daltrey and Van Morrison
Jermaine Jackson
Mick Jagger (*Alfie* film soundtrack)
Utada Hikaru
Dee C Lee
Natasha Bedingfield
Sinéad O'Connor
Anastacia
Heather Small
Roddy Frame
Dave Stewart



ability to do that flick, which gives you the power. The strength comes from the pull-back from the flick. Your thumb goes down and as it's coming off, that's where the power is from, in those milliseconds. I think a lot of people make the mistake of thinking that when you're thumbing, all the power has to go into the downstroke. It can be a bit hit and miss, if you'll excuse the pun. But thumbs down on a five-string is a bit of a nightmare if you're not used to that extra string being there. I'm working on both techniques at the moment, though, so I've got the option."

She continues: "Six-string bass is another matter. I'll have one made for me at some point, but I won't be slapping on that: I want to use it to explore soloing. I play a bit of guitar as well, and I use the backs of my fingernails to strum the strings: I do the same thing on the D and G strings of a bass. I feel a bit exposed when I'm singing and playing a bass-line at the same time, and for that reason I like to have a bit of harmonic accompaniment when I'm singing, but I prefer to play it on bass than on guitar. I might adapt some of my songs to include a six-string bass with a bass-line, plus the odd harmonic or chord to give me some harmonic support."

Ask Yolanda what the high points of her career so far have been and you might reasonably expect to point to her stints with stadium-sized acts such as Robbie Williams or Mick Jagger. Nope: she earns much kudos from us by focusing squarely on her development as an artist in her own right. As she explains, "One of the best things for me has been my personal achievements, and just being brave enough to do the things that I've done. When I had to get up and sing and play bass for the first time, I had never felt more sick with nerves, physically, in my life. It was a trio gig at the Jazz Café and I found it terrifying, because I'm not really a singer. I'm getting more confident, though. The idea is to sing as well in front of people as you do in the shower or when you're doing the hoovering. In front of an audience, though, I get a bit tense, and when that happens your voice closes up a bit. On top of that I lose a bit of concentration on the bass, so I have to stay alert and be well aware of where I'm going both vocally and with my fingers. I just have to make sure I know the bass parts perfectly, and then I can sing more freely."

In fact, Yolanda may be on the point of emerging from her session career to focus on her own work, simply because the years pass and new bassists come up every day. "There's a bunch of musicians coming up out of the colleges and they're great players," she observes, "so they're getting a lot of the work with newer artists, like the Adeles and Jessie Js of this world. You won't see the same faces in those bands that you would have seen in the 1990s. That is right and proper: you should make space for the new brigade, and everyone should have a chance to play with the best artists. So instead of waiting for the phone to ring, I've been getting off my backside and playing. My solo career is part of that: it's about not relying on other people's availability; when you're dependent on someone else, it really stops your gigging schedule and messes you up."

Yolanda Charles is a bassist who's doing things for all the right reasons. "I actually want to play bass," she concludes. "I don't just want to work for people who phone me. If I'm not being employed by someone else, I'll employ myself!" Hats off, we say.

STRING THEORY

Yolanda talks strings

"I love Elixir. They've been amazing to me. I've been endorsing them since 2009, but I've been using them since I was with Robbie Williams in 2001. I played bass at one of their trade shows, and I hadn't done one of those before: I just brought a knackered old looper with me. Since then I've done a few of those scary, under-the-spotlights masterclasses. They're tricky to pitch, because you've only got a few minutes, and people want pyrotechnic playing that will make them go 'Ooh!' That's not making music when you do that, though: I want to get up and play a few songs. People who appreciate that, really like what I do. I've played at Elixir's trade stand every year since then at the Frankfurt Musikmesse and NAMM. It's over 10 years now that I've been using them, but I've only been an endorser for three years, so for me it's been about a genuine love of the gear rather than, 'I'll take them because they're free!'"

KINGDOM THUMB

LEVEL 42'S MARK KING IS MORE THAN JUST A BASS-PLAYING ICON. HE'S ONE OF A KIND. PAUL GEARY MEETS THE MAN BEHIND THE STATUS . . .

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TINA K

"Over the years," muses Mark King, "when parents have asked me about their kids wanting to play an instrument, I always say buy the best one you can afford. If it doesn't work out, and you flog it, you get your money back. A good instrument is also much easier to play and sounds good. If you start off with a clunker that's impossible to play, the kid will get disheartened, and you'll have wasted your money. For me, it's just good insurance. You either spend £50 and waste the £50, or spend £150 and you'll get £130 back."

Such wisdom sums up the world-view that King and Level 42 have developed over the 33 years since their formation. The frontman's percussive slap-bass, often delivered at eye-wateringly high speed, was one of many factors that propelled the band to international stardom as one of the 1980s' best-known jazz-pop-funk outfits. His fame as a bassist makes it all the more interesting that King started his career as a drummer.

"I started dancing when I was five," he chuckles. "I won a twist competition at Camp Hill Prison Officers' Club [on the Isle Of Wight, King's birthplace]. The prize was a packet of Rolos, which was great, and a paper drum kit. I fell in love with the paper drum kit. Of course, it lasted about five minutes, but I had fallen in love with drums.

"So, from the age of five," he continues, "I was banging anything I could – not chicks obviously, I was five – but banging things with sticks. When I got to nine, I overheard some guys saying there was a drum kit for sale in my local town, Newport, on the Isle of Wight. After school I travelled about 10 miles there and back to find this drum kit and they were asking £10 for it, which was a lot of money back in 1968."

Level 42 began as all the best bands do, as a bunch of kids having a jam. "It was a band of four mates getting together, talking about music, thinking about what we were going to do, and how great it was going to be. I met Boon Gould and Phil Gould, the guitarist and drummer, when I was about 15. I grew up with them on the Isle of Wight. I was drumming and Phil and I would get together and talk about Billy Cobham, Tony Williams, Lenny White – these were the guys who were really doing it for us, the fusion players from America."

Asked about his early influences, King explains: "When I was 14 and my mum and dad had just bought a new TV, I didn't know how to turn it off so I inadvertently switched over and hit upon this guy stood there with a twin-necked guitar, dressed in white with short hair – this was in 1972 – and a guy behind the drums that looked like they were made of glass. One dude was sat behind this keyboard. I'd never seen anything like it before. I didn't realise it was just a Fender Rhodes with the top taken off, but it looked amazing. They had a violinist in the band, Jerry Goodman. It was the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and that was an epiphany for me.

"I had loved Cream since I was eight years old, then Jimi Hendrix of course. I was getting into Buddy Rich, but I just saw this and it changed everything for me. Suddenly it unlocked something in my head that I'd been looking for harmonically, and wanted to hear. It was so off-the-wall. It came at such a good time, because at the age of 14, you're looking to an alternative to what your parents like.

"Wind forward to around 19 years of age," he continues, "and we were all living in London, hanging out together because we didn't know anyone else. We had come from an island where you did know everybody, but London is a much

bigger metropolis and you feel like a really small fish. The Isle of Wight was a great place for the three of us to grow up, because there was lots of work – all these holiday camps, bars and pubs offering tons of live gigs."

King isn't the first musician to stress the value of live gigs as a musical education, but he's one of the most inspired. He tells us: "As I always say to any aspiring student, just play as much as you can with as many people as you can. You may not always like the songs or the music, half the time you're thinking 'I can't stand this stuff', but what's happening is you're exponentially broadening your horizons. You become such a well-rounded player. Growing up we'd listen to sax and trumpet players coming down to the holiday camps, who'd sit there and regale us with stories about how scary it is in London, about how they'd be walking down Shaftesbury Avenue and see Phil Seaman, one of the great jazz drummers. We thought London must be knee-deep in amazing players, but I was pleasantly surprised, when I got there, that it wasn't. Like anywhere else, you can go there and make your mark."

So how did King make the switch to bass? "I'd done a couple of things you do as a struggling musician. I joined bands overseas, one in Italy and one in Austria, and it was during the Austria trip that I lost my drums, my record collection and my clothes. It was one of those rock'n'roll horror stories. It didn't work out and I ended up coming back with nothing. But I was hanging out with my mates again and now Phil had drums, so the lucky swine was drumming in the band. I got a job in a music store just to get by. They didn't sell drums, but I told a bit of a fib and said I played bass, and that was it.

"I didn't really want to play bass," he continues, "it was forced on me. We thought this little band we were just having fun with would do until our ship came in, which would be some amazing band from America. I was playing bass, but I didn't really give a toss about it, and I didn't really think about laying some proper bass-lines down. I just started slapping around – like drumming on the bass."

Once King had begun to hone his style, success came calling, he remembers. "Ironically, the first single we ever recorded, by Andy Sojka on Elite Records, was called 'Love Meeting Love', which had quite an arpeggiated bass-line, all finger-style, no slap at all. It was this long, meandering thing. Andy, the producer, said he'd record it if we came up with a melody line and found a singer. We saw a chance to get something out. I didn't like the idea of someone else coming in, so I thought I'd have a crack at it. I came up with the melody and Boon and I just sat there one night and he mashed out the lyrics. That was how our songwriting partnership started, which continues to this day, 35 years later."

When it comes to bass guitars, King has played some beauties in his time. "When I got my £500 share of the

"SO, FROM THE AGE OF FIVE I WAS BANGING ANYTHING I COULD – NOT CHICKS OBVIOUSLY, I WAS FIVE – BUT BANGING THINGS WITH STICKS"

advance money to go and get a bass with, I was going to try and find a Wal, because everyone had said how great they were. It just happened that, at that time, they were experimenting with graphite in the neck – but the graphite and wood combination didn't work, they all ended up bending. I couldn't find one that I thought was any good, but then it just happened that in the corner of the shop was this JD Supernatural. It looked like an Alembic, which I'd seen Stanley Clarke play. I loved it, and it became synonymous with Level 42. Then Rob Green [of Status Graphite] came along, and I was using Status basses, then we went on tour with Steve Winwood and the Alembic guys came along and did a couple of signature models and they were beautiful. I stayed with the Alembics for 10 years or so until I knocked the band on the head in around 1994."

Times changed, and so did King's bass of choice, he tells us. "I had a couple of years not doing anything, then, when I came back, Fender got in touch and said they wanted to do a Jazz Deluxe signature model. The one thing I liked about the Alembics was the really flat fingerboard. I don't really like a cambered neck. So they incorporated all this into this Jazz Deluxe for me, and the poncy lights as well [on the fretboard] so I used those for a bit."

Enter Status Graphite once again. "Rob Green asked me why nobody had sat down with me and helped me design my own bass. So we had a couple of bottles of wine and I said, 'Why do basses have to be so big? Can't we have something that's really small and sexy?' I quite liked the headless design, with the tuning at the bridge, but you couldn't bend the notes. Rob said, 'Well, why don't we move the actual nut back and put the zero fret up here?' which was great because we gave ourselves the Bendwell [string-bending system]. The shape of the bass was really nice and I used those for about six years. Then I hit middle age, started eating and put on about four stone. I suddenly realised that these little basses were making me look even chubbier than I really was, so I asked Rob to make me a bass that looked thinner. He made a much bigger-bodied bass – and, sure enough, it worked."

But how about Mark's amps? He's been with Trace Elliot and Ashdown, and he's with TC Electronic these days. "It would seem like I'm a bit of a tart when it comes to gear," he laughs, "but I'm not really. I've been going 30-odd years now and when I began, because of the sound I was looking for, I had a Marshall 8x10 guitar cab with a Roland JC-200 amp head on top, because I liked the chorus in it. That was the first amp; we toured that for a year, then by the time I got to 1981, Trace Elliot came on the scene. On the way to a gig at Zero 6 in Essex, we stopped off on the way out there to have a look at an all-in-one 8x10 with a GP11 graphic, as it was then. It sounded great and I asked if they'd sponsor me. They said, 'No, we don't sponsor anybody, young man'. So I told them to come to the gig that night. They did, and afterwards they said I could keep the rig. I went on to have a hand-in-hand thing with Trace Elliot."

He continues: "Mark Gooday from Ashdown, a good old friend I'd known from the Trace Elliot days, brought along a load of stuff and asked what I was missing. I wanted the old Trace GP12 graphic thing. I asked him to give me my old 80s sound back. Of course he had all the old diagrams and everything, so they knocked out the Mark King head, which worked great for me. Then TC Electronic came along one day and told me to have a listen to their rig. They stood it up next to the other one and I couldn't believe what I was missing."

As we wind up our interview, has King got any advice for bass players? You bet he has. "You've just got to love it more than anything else," he says, "because that will get you through all of the crap times which I can guarantee you are ahead. You need total self-belief." Take it from a man who knows.

Level 42's* Running In The Family *box set is out now. Info: www.level42.com

Elixir® Strings for Bass

Your tone. Your feel.

Great tone, smooth feel, consistent performance from gig to gig. Bass strings that sound better for longer, removing the hassle and expense of frequent string changes.

The NANOWEB® Coating on our Stainless Steel and Nickel Plated Steel Bass Strings is more durable, delivers unparalleled tone life and also raises the bar in tone, feel and response.

Bass players tell us *Elixir* Strings retain their tone longer than any other string, uncoated or coated.

Yolanda Charles plays *Elixir* Strings Nickel Plated Electric Bass with NANOWEB Coating, Medium Gauge .045 - .105

www.elixirstrings.co.uk/bass

facebook.com/elixirstrings

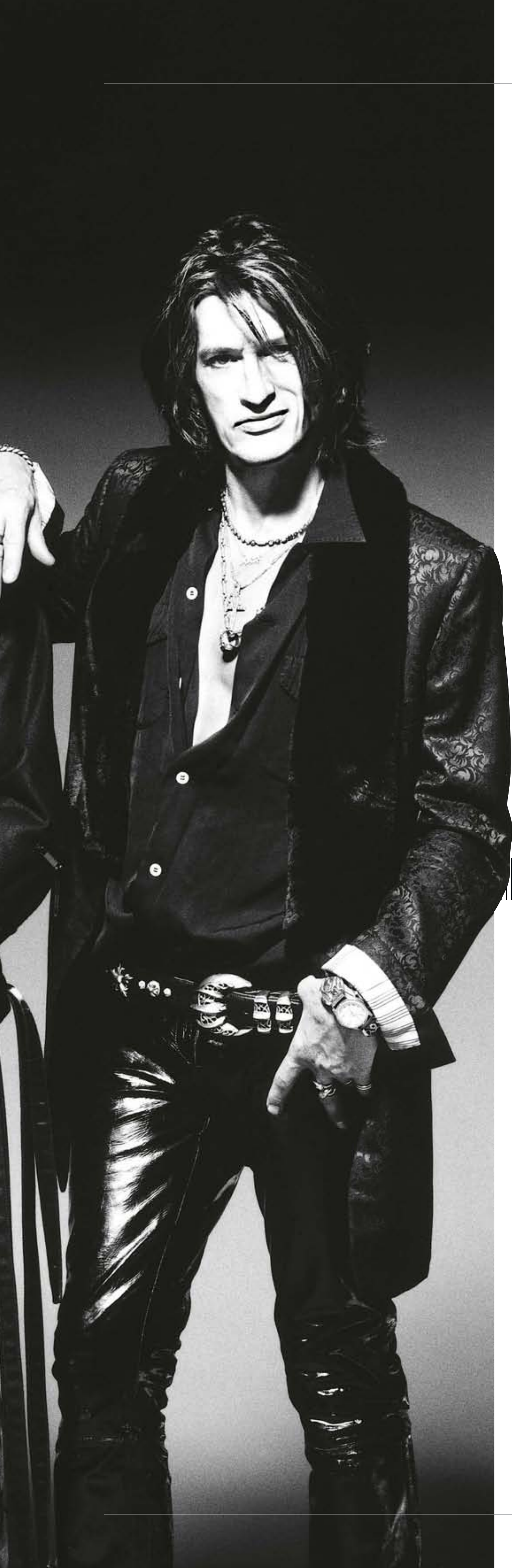
twitter.com/elixirstrings

youtube.com/elixirstringsmedia

GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE · LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2014 W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc.

ELX-267-ADV-UK-JUL13

"THE BEST THING I HAVE DONE IS REALISE BASS IS MUCH SIMPLER THAN I THOUGHT"



THE BASS DIMENSION

FIFTEEN ALBUMS DOWN THE LINE, AEROSMITH ARE STILL THE KINGS OF AMERICAN STADIUM ROCK. BASSIST TOM HAMILTON TALKS TO JON D'AURIA ABOUT THE HIGH END OF THE LOW NOTES

"I've been doing this for so long that I'm not fully conscious of the methods I use in writing songs or recording in the studio," says Tom Hamilton, relaxing in the living room of his home in Boston, Massachusetts. "I'm a bass player who is always looking for a little space to stick my neck out and make a statement on my instrument, but at this point in my career it all seems to come pretty naturally."

After 42 years of holding down the bass for one of the greatest rock bands of all time, Hamilton appreciates his downtime now more than ever. "We've been spending so much time on the West Coast between writing, recording and performing, it feels like I haven't been back home in a long time. I'm just trying to enjoy as much time relaxing as I can before we hit the road for the long haul of touring," he explains.

The product of Hamilton and his bandmates' hard work is the current Aerosmith album, 2012's *Music From Another Dimension!* For this album, the band reunited with longtime producer Jack Douglas, who worked on their most groundbreaking albums *Get Your Wings*, *Toys In The Attic*, *Rocks* and *Draw The Line*. "Our relationship with Jack is a classic one, where we come in and he really sets the method for how we get our sounds and conduct the sessions," says Hamilton. "I'll just start out with my bass in its most simple form, and then he tweaks it out and gives it the character it needs. This time around in the recording sessions, I used a combo of DI and amp mics on an old Ampeg B15, which is what I used in the 70s – it seems to always work."

He continues: "Recently I've been thinking of the bass more and more as a percussion instrument like a maraca or a tambourine – it has a beat and it keeps a certain rhythm. I went through a long period where I thought there were a lot of notes that I hadn't learned, and that I had to use counter-harmony to be heard within a song. But the longer I've played, the more I'm finding that I like focusing on the simplicity of my lines, while using rhythmic elements to spice them up."

Pics © Ross Halfin

The bonus track, 'Up On The Mountain', sees Hamilton take over the role of lead vocalist from Steven Tyler. "One thing that I've always loved about Paul McCartney is that he's a classic example of a bassist who can sing and play at the same time. It takes a lot of practice, but I think anybody can do it if they put enough time into it," says Hamilton. "On 'Up On The Mountain', the vocal line comes in and then the bass riff comes in afterwards, and on parts where they merge I'm usually pumping away at the root note, so it's not that difficult to sing. I've never been a singer and I never thought I'd sing on an Aerosmith song, but over the years I had to sing well enough to make demos to bring to the band to convey my song ideas. I pictured that I would sing the basic part and Steven would weave a beautiful line around what I was doing, but they ended up wanting just me singing the part."

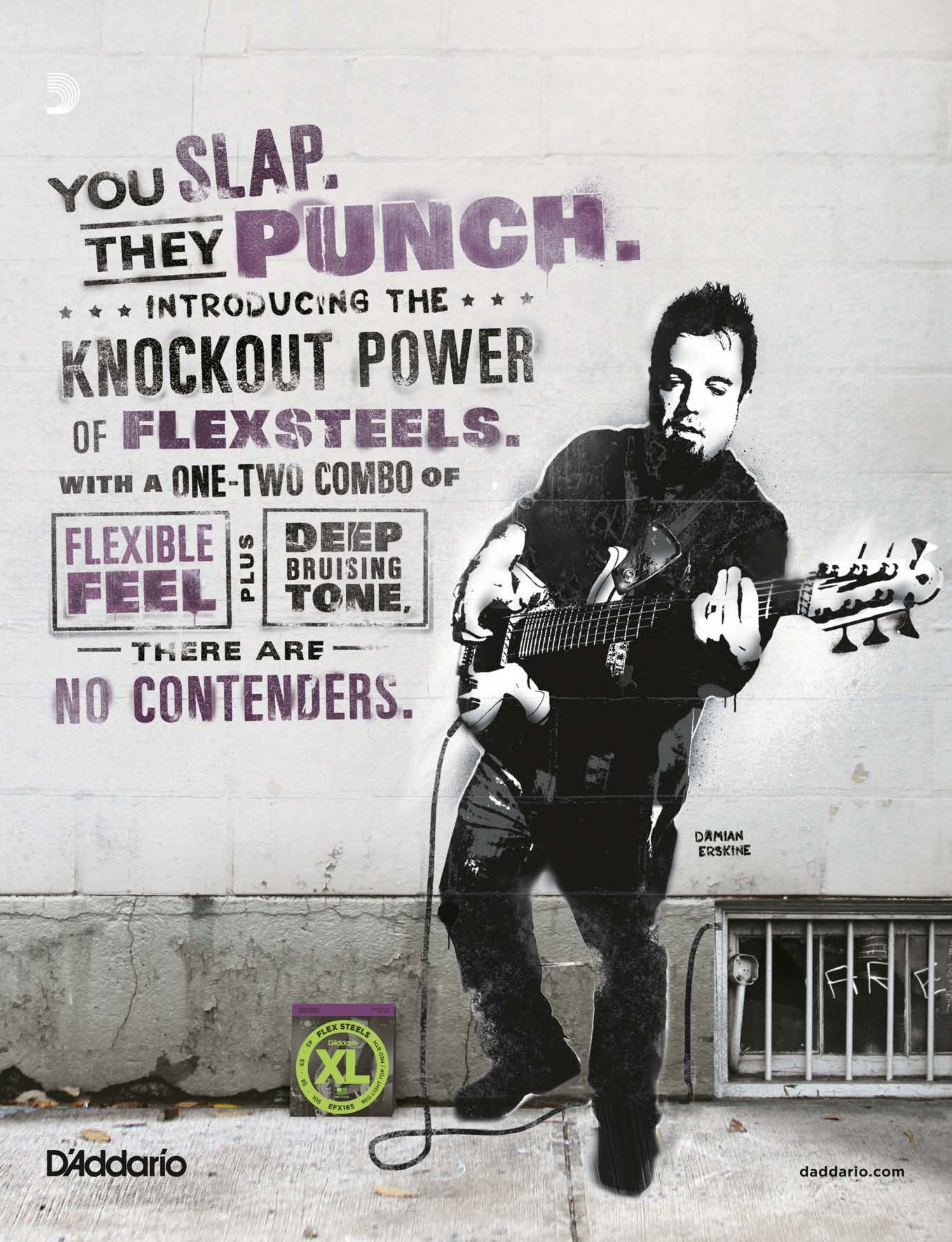
Hamilton has been known for his use of a variety of Sadowsky basses in the past, but this time around he used two new instruments. "For this album I used a Fender Jazz Relic from their custom shop. They make these really insane one-off basses and then they beat it up to make it look old, although I couldn't really give a crap about that," says Hamilton. "It's actually a bass that Steven got for me as a gift at the end of a tour a couple of years ago. I never used it much on stage, but I brought it in the studio and the damn thing just sounded amazing. I ended up using it for about three-quarters of the record. At one point, a rep from G&L stopped by the studio with this beautiful gold metal flake ASAT bass, which has a two-pickup system with a Jazz bass kind of feel. It was so easy to get a good tone with it. It has a great neck, and every note reads. They made me one out of pine and another out of ash, and they hollowed the bodies out to reduce the weight. Both of them came out sounding great.."

Hamilton's progression as a bass player has taken him from rooted, blues-influenced lines to expansive, technical grooves. "I think the best thing that I've been able to do is realise that bass is much simpler than I always thought," he says. "I've always been hung up on what I didn't know and I was always worried that there was more that I didn't know than I did know. But I've come to the conclusion that I know a hell of a lot more than I thought as far as harmony, rhythm and fingerboard technique goes. Now I'm able to just relax and approach it rhythmically. I definitely don't have the strongest ear in the business, but I have a strong sense of time and feel."

With all of the challenges Hamilton has faced in his 42-year span with Aerosmith, his biggest challenge came off-stage when he was diagnosed with throat and tongue cancer in August 2006. After taking time off, Hamilton defeated the cancer and rejoined his bandmates with a new perspective on life and music. "Man, I couldn't get over the fact that I wasn't going to be out on the road with my band: that was really unthinkable for me. I just kept asking doctors when I'd get back out there with them and they told me, 'Your job right now is to get rid of this cancer. You need to understand that this is what your life is about right now'," explains Hamilton. "It made me really appreciate how lucky I am to be in this band and have this role as a musician. It made me come to grips with the fact that we're closer to the end than we are to the beginning, so we have to appreciate every single moment. I don't take anything for granted."

He finishes: "At this point in my life, bass is all about curiosity for me. I know that if you play enough, you're going to come up with some good stuff. I'm very much a team player and I really enjoy that feeling of everyone being in a room together and working together as a unit. The bass is a team instrument, so it fits my personality to do what is best for the group and take a really supportive position. The bass has allotted me an amazing life in music: I'm so thankful to have the career that I do, and to still have the closeness with my bandmates even after all of these ups and downs over the years. There's nothing I would change from the past and as always, we're just focused on the future."

Info: www.aerosmith.com



YOU SLAP.
THEY PUNCH.
INTRODUCING THE
KNOCKOUT POWER
OF FLEXSTEELS.
WITH A ONE-TWO COMBO OF
FLEXIBLE FEEL
PLUS
DEEP BRUISING TONE,
THERE ARE
NO CONTENDERS.
DAMIAN ERSKINE
FLEX STEELS
D'Addario
XL
EFX165
D'Addario
daddario.com

ON YOUR MARCUS

THE LEGENDARY MARCUS MILLER IS THE BUSIEST MAN IN THE BASS WORLD. JOEL MCIVER PINS HIM DOWN FOR A CHAT ABOUT HIS NEW ALBUM, THE STATE OF HIS WRISTS AND THE DREADED 'SEINFELD SOUND'

When Marcus Miller, Victor Wooten and Stanley Clarke joined forces as SMV back in 2008, it was the obvious next logical step in each bassist's long and impressive career. These three guys are easily the most accomplished electric musicians in the nebulous funk/soul/jazz arena, having played with the world's most acclaimed bandleaders between them. You'd expect a clash of egos, right? Envelope filters at dawn, and so on?

Far from it, according to Miller. "You know what?" he chuckles, talking to us between rehearsal sessions. "We just picked up our basses and started playing! I heard what Stanley was doing and what Victor was doing, and they sounded like they were playing in the high range and in the mid range, so I just jumped right into the bottom and tried to fill that part up. I'm sure they did the same thing – just reacting to the other two players in the band."

This generally ego-free approach is typical of Miller, who is that rare thing, a man wholly devoted to his own vision ("the voice", he calls it) but entirely tolerant of the visions of others. At the age of 52, he's evolved a mature opinion of the way he used to play bass, as opposed to the way he plays it today. "I was a kid when I started playing," he enthuses, "so I played like a kid plays – with energy. Young, male energy! I played the bass, man, that was who I was, but as you get older you start playing for different reasons. You want to keep that energy, but you want to use it more judiciously."

You'll love it – we did – when he extends the metaphor, saying: "You want to be like that gunfighter who only shoots when he has to. Like Bruce Lee, man: you walk around saying 'I don't want to fight' and 'I don't want to fight' and then finally you say 'OK, now you've pissed me off!' and you kick everybody's ass!"

Not that there's any ass-kicking on Miller's new album, *Renaissance* (unless you're talking about his bass skills when compared to yours and mine). A quizzical, often mellow suite of songs, Renaissance delivers the expected range of bass mastery, whether it's fingerstyle or slapped, and across the instrument's full range. Talking of instruments, and continuing the Bruce "Don't think… feeeeel" Lee analogy above, Miller used a full fistful of basses this time. "There are five on the new album," he tells us. "I used my 1977 Fender Jazz, which is my regular bass; a 60s fretless; my Marcus Miller signature 5; and I've got an old French acoustic that I play on a couple of songs. And there's an acoustic-electric bass, too."

Ah, he mentioned his signature Jazz, a lovely and hugely popular instrument that many readers of this magazine will have plucked at some point. How many of those does he have stashed at home, we wonder? "I probably have four of the actual ones that you can get at the stores," he says, "but I also have a few prototypes – the ones which they will send to me during development, and I'll say 'I like it, but can you change this or that?', so I have a couple of basses which are a little different from the regular ones that ultimately go into production. They'll probably call me one day and ask for them back."

After all these years and all these albums, how does Miller keep his music fresh? "I have a lot of inspiration, but there's also a lot of not wanting to repeat myself," he explains. "I've been writing a lot of songs over the last 30 or 35 years, so I'm looking for something a little different and I'm inspired to try and find different colours and different approaches." In the case of *Renaissance*, Miller found a fresh approach by backing away from the precision-engineered production of his earlier work and going for a live feel. "On a lot of my albums, I'm showcasing my production as much as I'm showcasing my musicianship," he muses, "but because producing records with layers and layers of sound is much easier now because of GarageBand and Pro-Tools and all that, I decided that at this point in time I would much rather focus on the musicianship. So there's a lot less production on this album. We went in and cut the tracks live and focused on the performances and showcasing the really great musicianship that I get from the guys in the band."

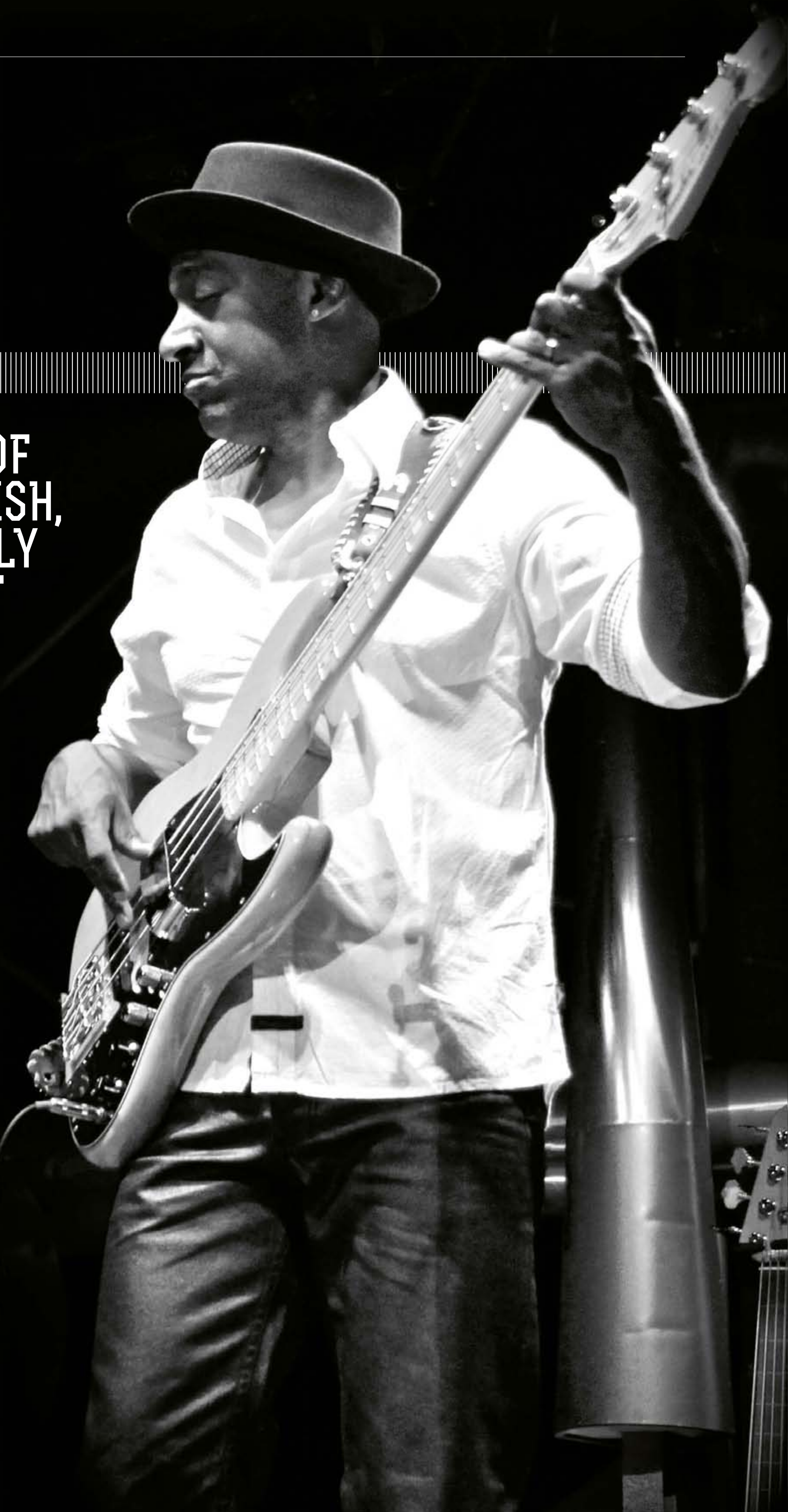
He continues, "The songs come naturally, but I still spend a lot of time going through different songs and trying to find the ones that I think are unique. When I write a song, I'll put it away and come back to it. Then if it sounds right when I come back to it, I'll know it has something. I try to place myself between the writer and the person who is reacting to the song. That takes some time."

© Mathieu Zazzo

BEGINNER'S TIP

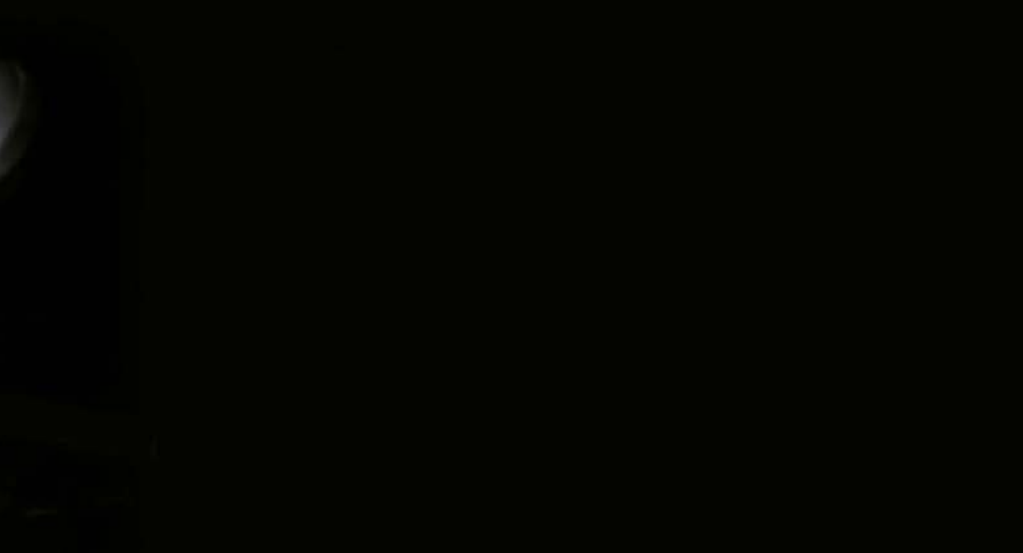
Advice from the man himself on how to get started on slap bass

"I would really like to encourage young players to listen to some Larry Graham records and to some of my old records, just to see how it went down. Try to understand what the slapping was doing in the music. There's playing that you do in a band, and then there's playing that you do in your bedroom and put on Youtube. There's nothing wrong with either one of them, but you should be aware of what it means to drive a band. It'll change you. Technically, you've just got to keep doing it and pay attention to your timing. A lot of guys play real fast, but they don't realise that they're not playing in time. Follow the line and you'll find your place in it. You might decide that being funky is not really what you care about."



"WE HAVE A LOT OF WORDS IN ENGLISH, BUT WE PROBABLY ONLY USE ABOUT 300 OF THEM TO TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT NEEDS TO BE SAID.
MUSIC
IS THE SAME WAY. YOU MAY ONLY USE SEVEN OR EIGHT NOTES, BUT THERE ARE INFINITE POSSIBILITIES"

© Maichael Sauvage



PRO TIP

The mighty Miller's advice for advanced bassists

"I'm a lot more serious about my rhythmic statements now, and my phrasing – stuff that a lot of casual listeners probably wouldn't even notice, know what I mean? To me there's a world of difference. Placement is an example: where on the beat I'm playing, whether I'm a bit behind or a bit before. The spaces. How long the notes are. All these things will really evolve in your playing."

As always, the core of Miller's music is the groove, which he dominates with economy and simplicity, the hallmarks of any funk player's technique. "There's a whole lot of ways to be simple," he says, "We have a lot of words in English, but we probably only use about 300 of them to talk about everything that needs to be said. Music is the same way. You may only use seven or eight notes, but there are infinite possibilities. Sometimes you just need to look at something in a slightly different way and it becomes something new. Or you can change your approach in a different way."

As well as his bass playing, Miller is known for his soundtrack composition, which begs the question of whether the bass guitar is as prominent in his film music as it is in his solo work. "The bass supports, unless I need some emotion down low," he says. "The only problem is that people know my sound real well by now. The guy who wrote the music for Seinfeld really fucked things up for me! When I'm recording a soundtrack, sometimes directors say to me, 'Is that a Seinfeld reference?'"

Miller has no resentment, however, about any association which people may have with his high-mids-heavy slap style and that famous TV series. "There are so many bass players out there, and they're all searching for an identifiable sound, but not many of them find it," he observes. "The fact that I have one is great: it's like my voice, so I surround it with unusual, different things and put it in different circumstances. I think people will say, 'I know that's Marcus, but he's doing some different stuff there' rather than start playing with a different sound."

Accordingly, you won't hear Miller changing his sound any time soon. "I have a six-string that I've been playing since the 90s, but I haven't fooled around with a seven-string," he tells us. "I enjoy playing them, but my voice is my bass: it's not the strings, or the range of the instrument: it's the sound. I don't really like the sound of a lot of new basses: they sound like a guitar, but an octave lower. Some guys are going for that – like Anthony Jackson: his ideal bass sound is a guitar an octave lower – but for me, it's more somewhere between a low guitar and an acoustic bass. I like that kind of relationship."

In fact, the differences in Miller's approach when writing soundtracks and his more usual music aren't as pronounced as you might expect. "The only difference is that my songs are inspired by something that I've thought or experienced myself, and in a soundtrack I'm trying to help the director convey his ideas to the audience," he explains. "You then go back to your own projects with extra tools, because you've tried methods of communication that you wouldn't normally try, because you're conveying emotions which aren't yours."

One particular song on *Renaissance*, titled 'Gorée', comes from a pretty dark place, Miller tells us. "About a year and a half ago, we played a concert in Senegal and during our day off before the show they took us to the island of Gorée, which has slave houses. They domiciled the slaves there for three months before they shipped them off to the Americas. You can imagine that it's a very emotional place: the guy was talking about a particular door which people walked through and, once you were through that door, you were never going to see your family or your continent ever again. It was the point of no return, and that was profound. I figured that I could put these emotions into a song." But how, we ask, is it possible to construct a bass part around something so traumatic? He answers, "You keep yourself in the mood you were in when you heard about these things, and you start playing: it's not difficult when the emotions are that strong."

Looking back across his career, Miller explains how his musical style has changed. "I had no idea who I was writing for, 15 years ago: I was just making music," he ponders. "But at the age of maybe 35, I started really getting into doing solo gigs, and because I was gigging, I got to meet the people who I'd been writing music for all these years. It was a beautiful experience, man: people would tell me how the music changed and affected them – and it changed me. You write music differently when you've got a feeling for the people. There were young kids, musicians who were looking to be inspired by you, and then there were people who were 70 years old and had been listening to you for 30 years. There was a bunch of different races – black, white, everything – and that really freed me up too, because there were people out there ready to listen to it."

It would be remiss of us if we didn't ask Miller what it was like to play bass in Miles Davis's band, which he did from 1981 to 1989. "It was a beautiful thing," he recalls. "The Miles that I got to know was very different to the Miles that most people read about. He was a very sensitive cat and very nurturing with his musicians. He was very encouraging to me when I was playing bass with him and when I began to write music in his band. He was very enthusiastic."

How about his actual bass playing – how has it changed over the decades? "It's definitely evolved," he says, "but I don't know if it's improved: other people can decide that. If I'd written an album like this 15 years ago, it would sound way different. My choice of notes has grown. I'm not playing all the notes now: instead, I'm trying to find the right ones. I also try to use the correct techniques, energy-wise, especially when I'm soloing: I throw a technique in there when it works emotionally, rather than playing for the four teenagers in the front row!"

Speed isn't everything, Miller says – and he should know, having mastered the art of flying fingers as well as considered, subtle lines. "When I was young, I came up in New York," he recalls, "and if you played fast that was a negative – unless you could make it funky. If you weren't funky but you played fast, you were just like the guy who dribbles a ball around the basketball court without doing anything. He does tricks, but he's not helping the team."

So will we be seeing Miller laying down his brand of bass brilliance far into the future? It seems so. "I know musicians of 50 and 60 whose sole occupation is talking about what they did when they were 25," he says. "But I recently played with Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, who are in their 70, and they played with enormous energy. They're arguably the best musicians in the world, and they're very inspiring to me – so no, I have no intention of retiring." Good news for all of us, you'll agree. ■

Renaissance *is out now. Info: www.marcusmiller.com*

FREEK OUT

BGM IS PROUD TO PRESENT THE ONE AND ONLY FREEKBASS, WHO BLEW MINDS AT THE LONDON BASS GUITAR SHOW 2014. JOE DALY MEETS THE GREAT MAN FOR A CHAT ABOUT ALL THINGS FUNKED-UP . . .

As his name rather clearly implies, funk icon Freekbass is no ordinary bassist – and his journey into funk virtuosity is no ordinary tale. 'Freek' is a critically acclaimed solo artist, a highly coveted session man, and a celebrated bass instructor, not to mention a protégé of the one and only Bootsy Collins. While his friends were signing up for Kurt Cobain's alt-rock revolution, Freekbass was busy laying the foundation for his own towering funk legend.

Nestled snugly in the hoary plains of America's rolling Midwest, Cincinnati has presided over the expansive evolution of funk from the mid-60s, when James Brown recorded a ferocious parade of hits at the city's King Records, into the golden age of the 70s and 80s when acts such as Bootsy's Rubber Band, the Ohio Players and Zapp filled the clubs with high-energy shows, eye-popping stagewear and thick, bouncy rhythms. Unsurprisingly, Cincy is also the hometown of Freekbass – and to this day it proudly stands as the funk capital of the world.

Recalling his formative years, Freekbass acknowledges the prominent role that the city's tradition played in his development: "People have asked me if I'd be playing funk if I grew up in a different part of the country. I tell them that I'm sure I'd be a musician if I grew up somewhere else, but I'm not a hundred per cent sure if funk would be such a calling for me, because it doesn't matter what part of Cincy you live in, it's always around, whether you're in the suburbs or the more urban areas. It's always on the radio stations."

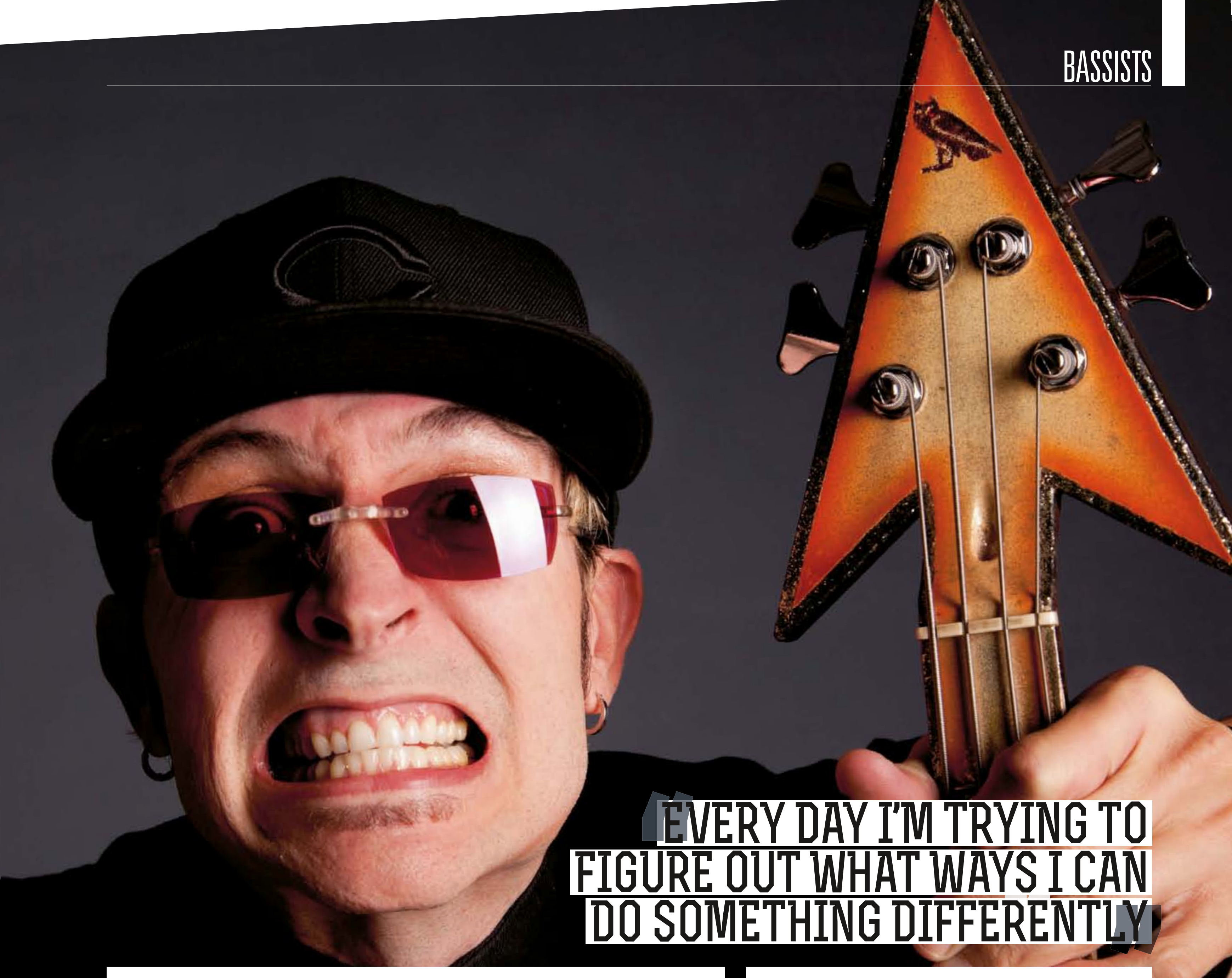
Like many bassists, Freekbass – thusly dubbed by Bootsy Collins and a name he now uses as his primary moniker – launched his musical odyssey with a guitar before eventually migrating to bass. As Freek progressed with his instrument, he developed an unusual thumbing style that would become a stylistic signature. "One technique I use that's a big part of my sound is a double thumb thing," Freek explains. "I was originally playing in a lot of rock bands that wanted more of a driving sound that called for a pick. I had used picks, obviously, from playing guitar, but I didn't like having to carry them around, and I didn't like always having to use one, so I started using my thumb in an up and down motion, like a pick."

When teaching this technique to others, he emphasises the need for tonal consistency. "You don't want to feel a big difference between the up or the down," he explains. "There should not be a big tonality difference, although I'm going to contradict myself, because I think that when you do upstrokes on bass, they have a different kind of bouncy, swingy feel than downstrokes do when you're using the double thumb approach."

To arrive at a level of proficiency only to rest on one's laurels is a seditious form of creative demise, and one that Freekbass avoids through a rigorous practice regimen. As he puts it, "Every day I'm trying to figure out what ways I can do something differently, using hammer-ons or incorporating things like that with other kind of techniques to take it to another level."

In the city of Cincinnati, any funk bassist who rises up through the ranks will inevitably cross paths with its most famous rhythm technician, Bootsy Collins, and Freek's introduction to the funk master would extend far beyond a simple handshake and a story for the grandchildren. Their inaugural meeting marked a new direction in both of the men's professional and creative lives that continues to this day.

In the mid-90s, Gary 'Mudbone' Cooper, a singer from Bootsy's Rubber Band, was gathering musicians for a Jimi Hendrix tribute album to be released on the



"EVERY DAY I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WAYS I CAN DO SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY"

Japanese funk label P-Vine. The record would not be a collection of Hendrix covers but music written about him by the artists on the album, including musicians from the Ohio Players, Earth, Wind and Fire, and Parliament-Funkadelic. Only after Freek agreed to play bass on one of the tracks did he learn who would produce it.

"I asked where we were recording it." Freek says, "and Mudbone said, off the cuff, like it was no big deal, 'Oh, Bootsy's going to produce it and we'll record it over at his place'. I was like, 'Oh, OK. Sure!' Needless to say, I was pretty excited."

The two bassists hit it off instantly and, reflecting on that first session, Freek believes he earned the elder statesman's respect by keeping it simple. "This isn't something I've shared a whole lot before," Freek says, "but I think Bootsy was digging what I was doing so much because I played a really simple, almost Temptations, 'Papa Was a Rolling Stone'-type bass line. Very simple. And I pretty much played it pocket like that. I didn't go in there because I was in front of Bootsy and say, 'Here, let me show you all my chops,' and go crazy. It was about playing the groove and not being the chops master."

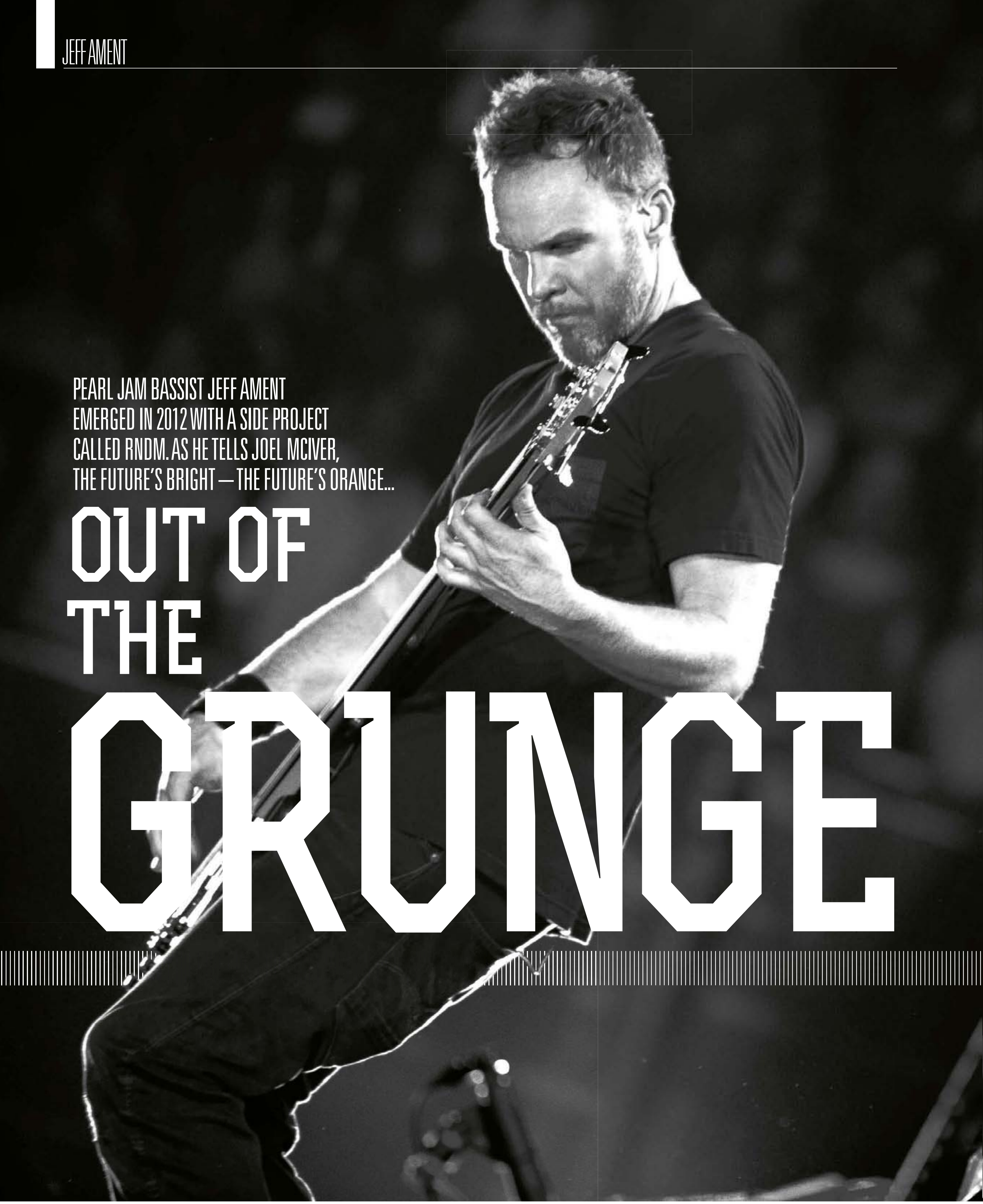
Freek's gear is as eye-popping as his style, and while his current arsenal includes some impressive axes, he is positively giddy about his newest bass. "Nils Valentin of Singdooba Basses got in touch with me through my Facebook page a couple months ago," Freek explains, "and said he wanted to build me a special bass. We talked about specs and what I'd like and I said, 'Make me the Batmobile, or Bassmobile,' which is currently in production. It will be my new bass for the upcoming Freekbass album and shows." For more traditional funk and groove, Freek plays a Grove Bass custom and a trusty 75 Fender Jazz that he runs through Kustom amplifiers.

In addition to employing his virtuoso skills as a highly in-demand hired gun, Freek also has five solo releases to his name. These reveal an arc from traditional pop-oriented song structures to more experimental outings such as T*he Air is Fresher Underground* and *Concentrate*, which contains no vocals. "I let the bass be my voice on that album," he says.

Most recently, Freek joined the Kelly Richey Project, a fiery blues-based trio that sees the bassist expanding his repertoire far beyond its funk-friendly confines. Kelly, also a Cincinnati resident, is a veteran blues guitarist who was looking to modernise her sound with a more groove-oriented approach for an upcoming album. Through a mutual friend, Freek and Kelly exchanged emails and were soon standing across from each other in the studio. According to Freek, the connection was instantaneous. "I love her playing," Freek says. "Even though she's a blues player, she's very funky and groovy. She almost reminds me of the old Funkadelic stuff, the late-60s and early-70s, Eddie Hazel Funkadelic stuff in terms of her playing."

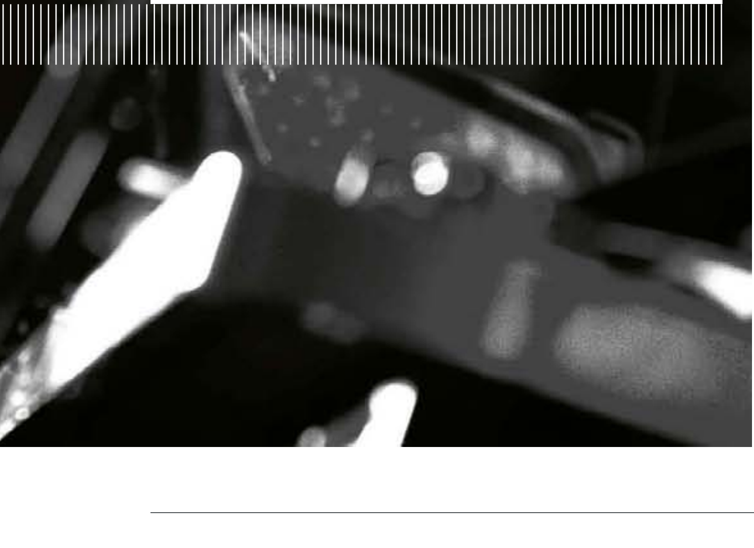
In the meantime, there is no rest for the funky. Freek's got a new bass on the way, a new album to write and he will continue to tour with the Kelly Richey Project as his schedule allows. There is also a steady stream of lessons to give and his ongoing collaborations with his good friend Bootsy. Looking back on all that Freek has accomplished, taking a pass on Nirvana and Green Day turned out to be a pretty good decision after all. ■

Info: www.freekbass.com.



PEARL JAM BASSIST JEFF AMENT EMERGED IN 2012 WITH A SIDE PROJECT CALLED RNDM. AS HE TELLS JOEL MCIVER, THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT – THE FUTURE'S ORANGE...

OUT OF THE GRUNGE



It's funny to think, 20 years after the fact, that Pearl Jam were once lumped in with the Seattle grunge movement alongside Nirvana and Mudhoney. While those bands specialised in what was effectively a smoothed-over form of punk rock, Pearl Jam were something else entirely, with stadium-sized songs and a sheen that made them suitable for main-stream acceptance. Little wonder the grunge scene is long gone and Pearl Jam are bigger than they've ever been.

So big, in fact, that they can afford to take plenty of time off, which affords the band-members the opportunity to do lots of other stuff. One of these projects is RNDM, a project put together by bassist Jeff Ament with singer-songwriter Joseph Arthur and drummer Richard Stuverud. The trio's debut album, *Acts*, came outin 2012 and gave them a foothold in radio-rock territory, or what remains of it now that the media is in tatters. Looking back, Ament tells *BGM*: "*Acts* was the smoothest recording I've ever done, especially as Richard and I were going in with Joe for the first time. I made a solo record back in 2011 that had a song called 'When The Fire Comes' on it, and I kept hearing Joe singing that song – and so I reached out to him and asked him if he might be interested. He did the vocal for it and it sounded great, so we collaborated after that. We had six songs written after the first day!"

A Mike Lull endorser for many years, Ament asked Lull to provide him with a special bass this time out. "I painted it fluorescent orange, because that's kind of the theme of the band," he says. "My signature Lull is like an oversized Thunderbird shape with a reversed headstock, and it's the one I've been mostly playing with Pearl Jam. It has a maple neck on it. Mike's been building me basses for 20 years, since 1993, when he first started building me basses with Modulus graphite necks. Just about every tour I get a crazy idea for a body shape or a pickup configuration, and he usually tries to talk me out of it..."

Asked how he hooked up with Lull, whose basses have been reviewed in these pages on several occasions, and Ament recalls: "He's a Seattle guy, and as far back as [pre-Pearl Jam band] Mother Love Bone he would work on our stuff. If we had issues with our basses, or if they needed setting up or refretting or cleaning up, he was our local guy. After Pearl Jam started, I had specific ideas about what kind of basses I wanted and he was like, 'I can build anything'. Having a guy like that in your backyard was pretty amazing."

Pearl Jam is known for their big guitar sounds courtesy of six-stringers Stone Gossard and Mike McCready, and also occasionally singer Eddie Vedder. To cope with the phalanx of riffs, Ament and Lull have had to work closely on tone. As Ament explains, "Early on, the first couple of basses that Mike built for me had clean-sounding active pickups, which he was really into, but I always wanted my basses to grind a little bit more – so we'd find old P-Bass pickups or Bartolinis, which I was using early on. Over the last 10 years we started messing around with an old Thunderbird pickup unit, which to me is the ultimate rock bass pickup."

He adds: "In Pearl Jam there's often keyboards or a Hammond B3 organ as well as the guitars, and for me it's about trying to find a spot in that low-mid area. I've never really been a big fan of midrange unless I'm playing fretless. The pickup on my signature Lull doesn't get all honky and weird-sounding, it has real character to it. The necks are graphite-reinforced these days: they're not fully graphite like I used to have. The one downside of graphite necks is that they often feel really cold! They do travel amazingly well, though: I never had tuning issues, ever, no matter how hard I was playing or how much I was jumping around."

Looking back on his career, Ament recalls: "I started playing bass at my first year of college, which would have been 1981. I've always been into music: I played piano and sang in the high-school choir and all that stuff, and then later on I was into punk rock and joined a band with a buddy. He said he'd teach me to play bass, so I traded my Gibson copy for a white Fender P-Bass that he had. We played a bunch of Ramones and Clash songs and within a few months, we were doing gigs. Apart from a few upright bowing lessons, I've never had lessons."

His heroes were a mixture of cult bassists and headbangers, he explains. "I was really into Mick Karn and Tony Franklin and Andy Fraser. Andy is an unsung hero, man. Steve Harris, too: you always have to give props to guys whose bass playing defines the sound of their band. Cliff Burton had a crazy sound too, it was his own thing. Geezer Butler, too: the way that he played had such a huge effect on his band's playing."

On Pearl Jam's first debut album, *Ten*, released in 1991, Ament remembers that he challenged his own playing. "I had this spirit that I wasn't going to play a fretted four-string on any of the songs, and I think I pulled it off apart from on one song," he says. "I'd only played a fretted four-string for almost 10 years, and I thought I'd better change things up and recreate whatever my sound is."

Given his punk and OK, let's say grunge background ("It sounds so weird to say that we were a grunge band now," he agrees), it's no surprise that learning slap bass was low on Ament's list of priorities. "I have zero slapping chops, apart from a song that we just wrote where I do a little bit of popping," he says. "There were guys in the 80s who I thought did it really well: the way that Mick Karn would pop and slap a fretless, I thought was super amazing. And Flea: I couldn't play more differently than him, but he's one of my all-time heroes. We've toured with him, and that dude is so committed to playing great."

Any tips for our readers, Jeff? Here's some advice from a man who knows about how to expand your bass chops. "Every time we go to tour, I'll make a list of 20 songs that are bass-heavy in some way, and sit along and play along with them in a hotel room," he says. "That's the most interesting way for me to learn how to get better: it doesn't feel like work that way. I did a bunch of Bruce Foxton and Jah Wobble songs last time out. It works best for me if I can focus in a song and close my eyes and something melodic will come along." If it works for the guy from Pearl Jam, it might work for you too. Give it a try...

Acts is out now. Info: http://rndmband.tumblr.com/Music

HOOKED ON BASS

THE SOMETIME JOY DIVISION AND NEW ORDER BASSIST TELLS MIKE BROOKS ABOUT HIS NEW BAND, THE LIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TINA K

As a breed of musician, we, as bassists, more often than not have our role within a band mapped out. You're part of the rhythm section, the glue that makes the individual instruments and overall sound bind together and, for the most part, this is what we do. There are a handful of bassists who think outside of that particular box, though, and they're instantly recognisable by their tone and playing style. One such bass player who has always trodden his own path is Peter Hook and with several projects in process and numerous musical commitments, he's had a busy couple of years to say the least.

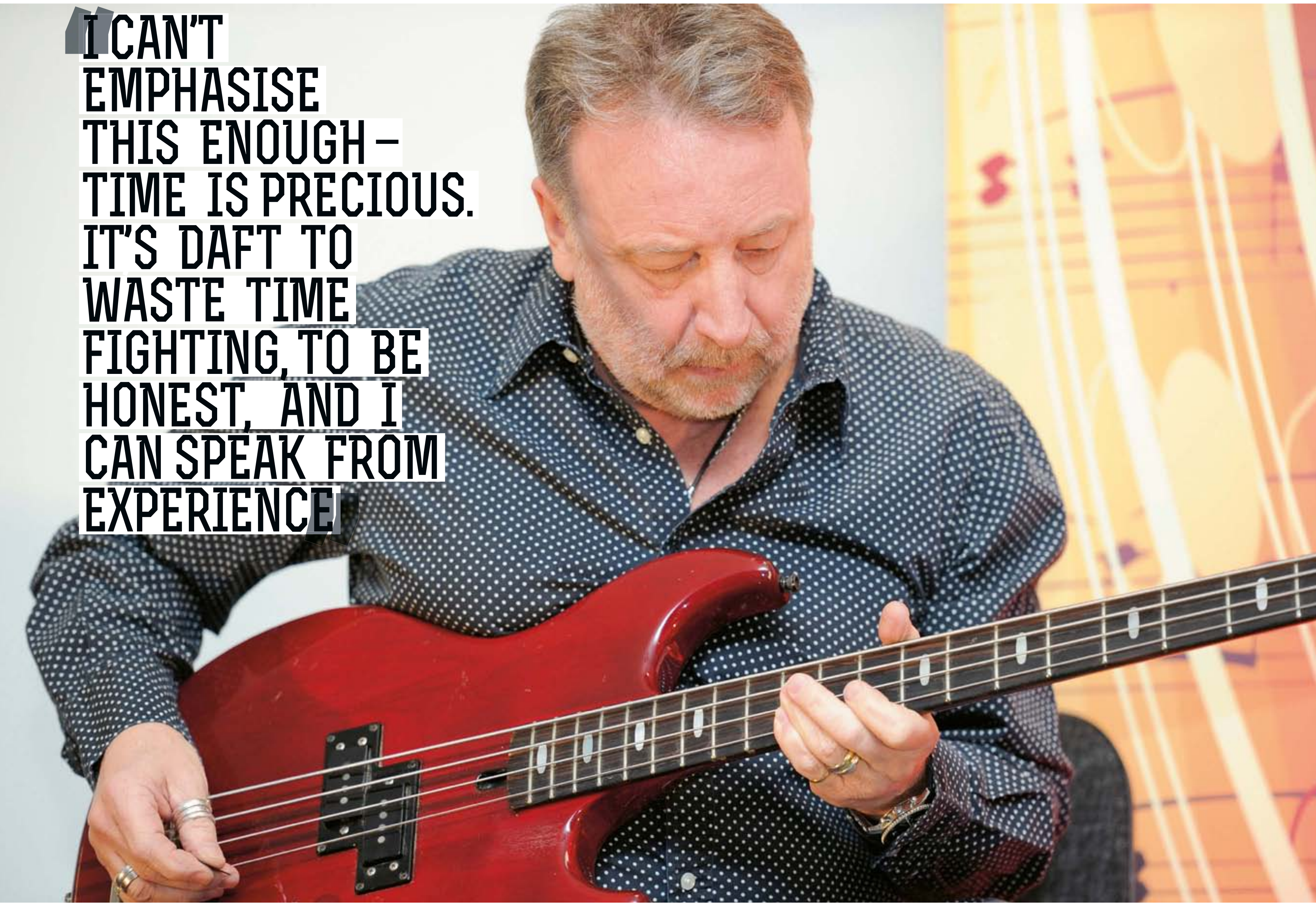
With a colourful history as an integral part and co-founder of both Joy Division and New Order, his DJing 'bit on the side' and his collaborations with Revenge, Monaco and Freebass since he left New Order in 2007, this is not a man who sits around for long and lets the grass grow under his feet. His most recent work with The Light has seen a return to the stages of the world, the current schedule including shows in the UK and Russia. Is Hook excited by the prospect of being able to play at home and abroad to such a faithful following? "Well, the thing is that we're playing really well and I do get excited about it," he replies. "I remember Barney [Sumner, New Order] said to me once, 'You'd play in Beirut, wouldn't you?' He said it as an insult, but I thought 'Yeah, I'd love to play in Beirut'. To me, what we do seems like such a gift: we have to remember that other people do work for a living."

"The Light came together naturally," he adds. "It was just people I'd worked with. Paul Kehoe [drums] and Andy [Poole, keyboards] were with me in Monaco, Nat [Wason, guitar] came in via Freebass and when it came to me having to sing, there was only one choice as my bassist, my son Jack, who had also played with us in Monaco. So it was quite easy in truth, and having Jack there, the closest thing to me, does make a lot of sense really: he's also the same age I was when I was in the band."

The Light recorded a show at Manchester Cathedral back in January 2013 where they performed *Movement* and *Power, Corruption And Lies* in their entirety: the CD is now being made available to the fans. "It was very hard work doing those albums," he says, "but the band rose to it. The boys are so good that I do feel a duty to let people hear them. They are so dedicated and put so much effort and time into it, I wish they had written it. As soon as you strike up the songs, they sound fabulous. I'm so glad to be able to revisit the back catalogue, and the full albums as well, as there were so many tracks we neglected as New Order. What we look to do is almost the opposite of what the others are doing in 'New New Order'; they look to change everything, whereas we look to play it as it was written, and really it's an odd position to be in because what you're doing is transposing the record, because the records themselves were groundbreaking. *Power, Corruption And Lies* was a seminal LP, listening to it again after all this time, but people listen to tracks nowadays as opposed to albums. I suppose I'm trying to champion the LP as an art form."

There must have been some apprehension beforehand? "I have to admit I was terrified!" he chuckles. "I was too frightened on the night to take anything in. It has been a very difficult period, this, to try and claim your music back [referring to his split with New Order a few years ago – Ed], when the whole thing has been taken away from you. It was wonderful to feel that you had got that part of it back but I was very, very nervous on the night, I think you can hear that in the recording. You've got to prove it to Manchester, that's where it all started, and that's your benchmark for everywhere else. To be honest, I don't really care about anywhere else apart from Manchester, and to stake your claim there was important to me. Manchester audiences are tough audiences, and to have sold it out long in advance made me feel like we were doing something right."

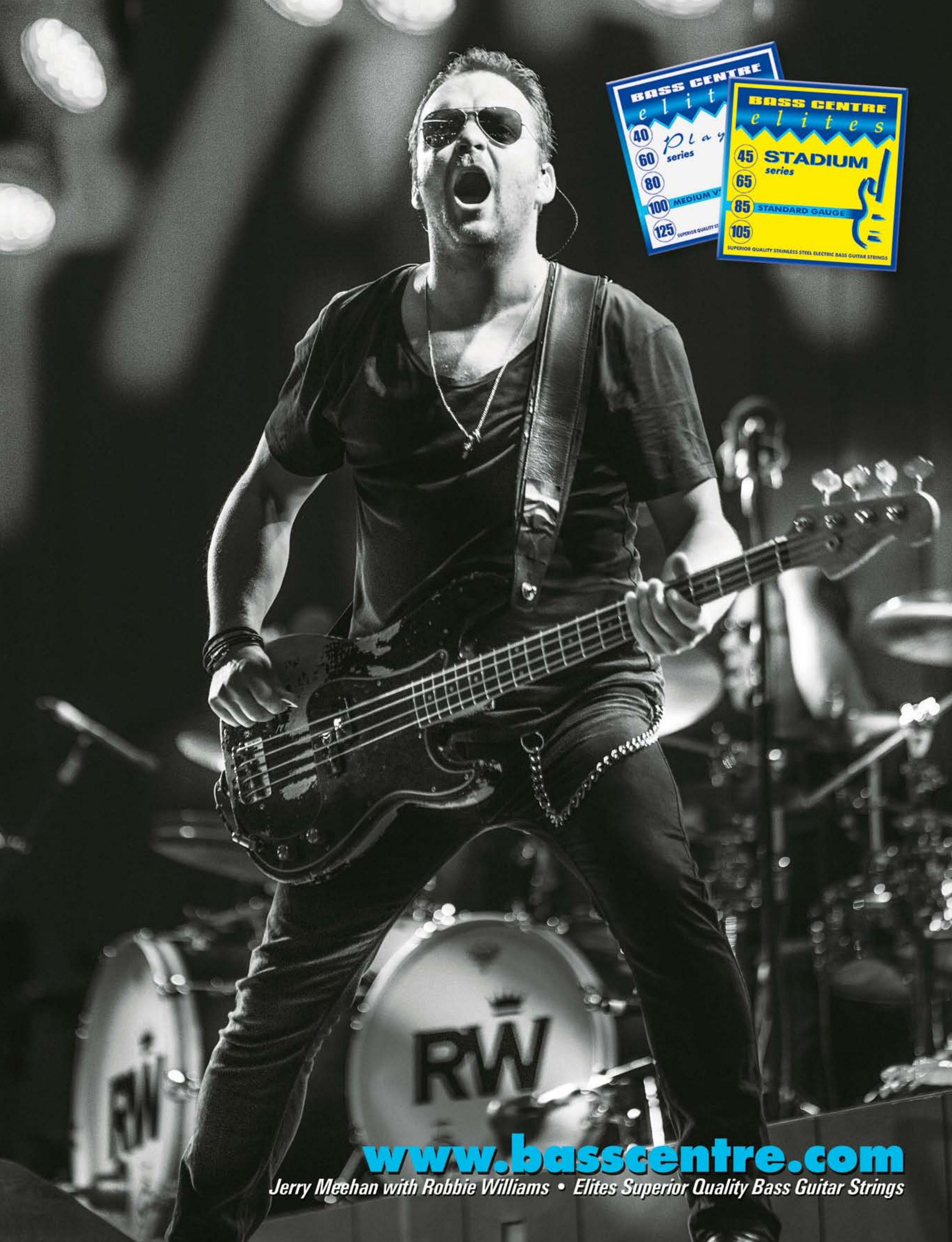
What was the initial musical stimulus that got the young Hooky inspired? "Without a doubt it was the Sex Pistols and the whole punk scene, really," he recalls. "That was the great thing about punk, it was instant. You didn't have to be able to play, it was a release of emotion and



it was much needed at the time. All those big heavyweight bands of the 70s were just that, heavyweight. Punk was a signal to the young of the time and it set many of us on our way, got us up off our arses and got us out there, doing something, creating stuff. Which was no bad thing! It was the attitude more than anything that got me switched on, the musical side of it came afterwards. But it seems like a lifetime ago, it really does. The 80s was a busy, busy time: we worked bloody hard for years, but it used to take an age to get things done. 'Blue Monday' took ages, maybe almost a year, 'The Perfect Kiss' took nine months – and looking back, you just can't work like that anymore. The money simply isn't there to indulge yourself in that way, and the way the business works now is so, so different."

With the music business going through a period of turmoil, with no end in sight it would seem, does the bassman have any forthright views as to the current state of play within the industry? Silly question… "The record industry didn't think we could reach this point but they actually made it this way," he states. "The kids of today don't really attach any value to anything anymore, especially music – they just expect everything to be available for free. Totally disposable. I made some recordings available online and although I should have priced it properly, I just charged 99p and the fact that one person paid that 99p made it worthwhile in my eyes: someone valued it enough to pay for it. But it's the same as being in a band, kids don't think about what will happen when the band split up. Even now, kids go into bands with blinkers on. Given everything that has gone on over the past few years with me, it is in every young band's interest to sit down and draw up an agreement between them about what will happen when the band ends. It's too easy to think it'll all be okay when you split, but it never is. It's almost like having a pre-nuptial agreement: being in a band is not much different from being married anyway. So how will everything be carved up when you go your separate ways, you know? The daft thing is that all the money you make, you end up paying out to lawyers to deal with the fact you didn't agree things in the first place, from the start. I can't emphasise this enough – time is precious. It's daft to waste time fighting, to be honest, and I can speak from experience."

Although Peter would happily admit that he is by no means a bass-playing technician, bass players and fans alike were treated to his masterclass at the 2013 London Bass Guitar Show. Judging by the feedback since then, the masterclass received a massive thumbs up. How did Hooky think it went? "Being at the show was a lot of fun. The masterclass was bloody nerve-wracking, but on the whole, enjoyable. It's all about giving something back to the people who follow you, and spending time signing stuff for fans isn't a hassle. Some of these people have been fans for decades, and they've taken the time to come and see you so why not give something back. It was nice to be able to say hello to people like Barry Moorhouse from the Bass Centre, especially as I've been using their Elites strings for Lord knows how long. The vibe overall was good, I had a great time!"


BASS CENTRE
elites
STADIUM
series
45
65
85
105
STANDARD GAUGE
SUPERIOR QUALITY STAINLESS STEEL ELECTRIC BASS GUITAR STRINGS
40
60
80
100
125
series
RW
www.basscentre.com
Jerry Meehan with Robbie Williams • Elites Superior Quality Bass Guitar Strings

GOLDEN GRAHAM

LARRY GRAHAM IS THE ULTIMATE FUNK BASSIST. NO ARGUMENTS. MIKE BROOKS MEETS THE GREAT MAN FOR A CHAT ABOUT INVENTING SLAP BASS AND OTHER MATTERS OF BOOTY-SHAKING IMPORTANCE . . .

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TINA K

It's a cold, cold day in Camden and there's snow in the air. But, after a storming opening night at the Jazz Cafe, Larry Graham is spritely, upbeat and positively full of the joys of spring. "We live in Minnesota now, so snow is no stranger to us. We can cope with this!" beams the 66 year old – who, based on last night's performance, is defying the years with ease. This man sings and plays like a man half his age, and yet, not content with merely playing bass, he's not averse to throwing a few dance moves into the mix. We'll have a pint of whatever he's having…

Larry is in town for a three-night run in Camden to promote his latest album, *Raise Up*, and following his appearance on Jools Holland's show in the autumn, there's a buzz going round. Not that Larry ever went away: when his projects allow him a little downtime to relax, you'll find him working with a myriad of top names, all grateful for his input. With a rare opportunity for a face-to-face interview, we wanted to dig a little deeper than the well-trodden topics Larry inevitably gets asked about.

Starting out in a singing band and playing guitar, organ and drums, did Larry always sing – and did he sing in church as a child? "No actually," he replies. "I was raised in the Catholic church, so the music was quite different. In school I took up clarinet and saxophone, so I started getting into the horns, but musically my roots weren't in the church – they were in music outside the church. If you remove the lyrics, a lot of the music is the same, but when you insert religious words, that makes it gospel."

With a baritone vocal range, did his voice break before he picked up a bass? "Yeah! When I was in junior high school, before my voice changed, I sang a lot. I liked Frankie Lymon, and then we go through a period as guys where our voices crack. I didn't have that: I just woke up one day and my voice changed to a baritone. You know you'll go from a boy to a man – you just don't know when." Did it concern Larry that he might be relieved of his vocal duties? "No, it worked in my favour. I worked with my mom's trio, and when people would make requests, she would cover the female material and I'd cover the male stuff. Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole: I'd do all those requests. That was during the time of my transition from guitar to bass."

Did playing piano and guitar help to establish his voice and train his ear? "When my mother and I worked together, she'd play the bass-lines on piano when I soloed on guitar, and I'd play the bass-lines on guitar when she soloed," he replies. "I really had a few things going on at the same time, because I was playing and singing. I guess you found then that more guitar players were singing than bass players, but when I added bass pedals out of necessity, doing the three things might have been daunting if I'd had to think about it. So I was ahead of other bassists, as when I eventually moved to bass I was relieving myself of the guitar duties."

With so many roles to juggle, does Larry ever find himself dropping out of autopilot and thinking about what he's doing? "It hasn't happened so far," he tells us. "For the most part, I don't really think about it. The only time my focus shifts is when I'm just playing bass, maybe doing something in the studio or working on someone else's material. I got used to moving between roles when I worked with my mom. I then did much the same in Sly & The Family Stone. I'm comfortable with either singing or playing. When I'm creating parts in a creative environment, my focus might shift – and in that situation, you're thinking of vocals that work with the part. 'Hair', for example, I obviously wrote on bass: everything is built around it. Then I thought about drums that would accompany that. On the other hand, a song like 'Today' started on piano, so I wasn't thinking about bass so much, more the vocals that would complement it."

With his vocal range, has Larry ever found it tricky to sing in the same register in which he plays, or does it make it easier? "No, I know how to stay out of the way of myself with my voice. There are some bassists that I've played with, where we can play at the same time and complement each other. Marcus Miller and I work well together, for example, as he plays his lines like a vocalist. When Stanley and I work, he plays piccolo bass, but they don't clash as his choice of part is different. Prince and I play bass, and again it works, even though it's different."

Did Larry find that being a multi-instrumentalist made the transition to playing bass easier, as he knew what everyone else would play? "It has affected my choice of notes and patterns by being a drummer first. If I didn't have knowledge of drums, I wouldn't be so conscious of staying out of the way," he reasons. "Having not worked with a drummer when playing with my mother, when I eventually worked with Greg Errico in Sly & The Family Stone, it was either going to work and be totally cool or it would be a train wreck – I didn't know which. Greg, being the drummer he is, totally played around what I was already doing: he didn't ask me to lighten up, it never

A MEETING OF THUMBS

The temperature outside may have been Baltic on all three nights of 11 to 13 March, when Larry Graham and his band brought the funk to Camden, but inside the Jazz Café, temperatures were soaring. You may have arrived feeling cold and grumpy, but I doubt you left without a smile on your face.

Sunday's show was a more relaxed affair than the following nights, but the crowd was treated to a full-on funk assault, showcasing Larry's legendary talent and revealing what a tight band he has assembled. The setlist contained all the gems from the Sly & The Family Stone catalogue, and the 24-carat nuggets from the debut GCS album, but we were also treated to covers of 'I Can't Stand The Rain' and Stevie Wonder's 'Higher Ground', along with the prerequisite funk jams incorporating the whole band.

Halfway through, there were a few gasps as Larry left the stage, only to return with Mark King in tow for a rather special bass slapathon. For the throng of bass players inevitably in the audience, it was something of a spectacle to witness the godfather of slap and the best British exponent of the art over the last 30 years sharing a stage. Mark reappeared for the encore, but that wasn't the last we saw of him as he returned on both Monday and Tuesday nights.

Tuesday's show, being Larry's last night, was always going to be sold out, and the venue was heaving as the band took the stage. With a few names in attendance, we not only caught Mr King for a third night but we were also treated to an appearance by Paul Turner and Rob Harris from Jamiroquai. As the show reached its climax, Paul, Rob and Mark all returned for the finale which had the whole crowd grooving, bouncing and singing in full voice. By the time the show ended, you were left in no doubt that there's no sign of Larry letting up: he's a lesson to us all.

happened, it was just very natural. It may have had something to do with the genius of Sly. He picked me based on me playing with my mother without a drummer. But Sly is multi-talented too, he could have been the bass player in the band, but he chose me, being a bassist himself. We never competed for space in our parts, though. He doesn't play the most simple lines, but they have well chosen spots like in 'Dance To The Music' or 'Sing A Simple Song'.

Larry was with Sly between 1966 and 1972: how did the collaboration affect Larry's bass-lines? Did Sly give him a guide? "Part of the genius of Sly and the band in that period is that he allowed us to be ourselves," he recalls. "Greg's drum part in 'Dance…' came from Greg's heart. If someone had changed it, nobody could play like Greg, so you'd miss out on something. No one played guitar like Freddie Stone, either – so allowing me to play how I played meant he created a greater sound, and that he was getting the best part from each one of us."

In turn, how does Larry view the fact that anyone can now record bass parts on home recording set-ups when they aren't actually bassists? "People say 'I wonder why this record isn't hanging around like older songs', or 'Why do people forget songs so quickly?' It's because it isn't reaching the heart of the people. When you play a song as a rhythm section, the tempo can change a bit. You're not locked so much to technology so the emotion of the song is felt, and you're communicating with the hearts of others. When you're locked in, someone might not know why, but emotionally they aren't feeling it – it's not living or breathing."

We ask if Graham Central Station had been in Larry's mind before he left Sly & The Family Stone. "No," he recalls, "starting another band wasn't my intent. I had been constantly writing

songs; at home we were all writing. My first thought was producing and writing for a new band. I had tons of stuff at home and played it all myself, so I put a band together with Chocolate [aka Patrice Banks] and called it Hot Chocolate [not to be confused with Errol Brown's band]. They had a show in San Francisco one night at a club called Bimbos, and the show was going great. The crowd knew that I'd put the band together. They got to the end of show and the focus of attention turned to me. Being the writer and producer, there was an instant connection: everything elevated to another level and it was very special. I wanted my intent to be in the band, but it was a natural change, and so I called it Graham Central Station."

In the late 60s and early 70s, with the likes of Bootsy Collins bringing funk to town, did Larry feel he was in competition with the other bassist? He explains, "We were both aware of each other, but we were different: we were related like cousins, but not blood brothers. There's a difference, a mutual respect: when you listen to Bootsy, there is no mistake who that is. He has a definite sound and a way of playing. There was never any competition. We both enjoy what the other does."

Mark King made an appearance with Larry and GCS on the first and subsequent nights of this UK tour. We were interested to know if Larry had been aware of Mark and Level 42 over the past 30 years. His beaming smile makes an appearance again: "Bass players are always aware of other bassists, although I went through a long period of time where I didn't realise my influence on other bassists. There weren't lots of videos of my stuff around, so people couldn't see what I was doing, but as we did more TV shows, people realised they had to play like me, especially in covers bands that played the tunes I'd played on. Over time, I became more aware of players playing like me. It became more and more, and then players in other genres started thumping and plucking. To me, they are like my bass children. I have high respect for the overhand style of playing but when I see a player pull that thumb back, it's another of my bass children right there."

Although Larry uses a number of effects, he doesn't overuse them. Rather, they add a different flavour to his tone. Does he often try new tones out, or does he prefer to stick with tried-and-trusted? "I'm always open to other sounds," he muses, "but I go for sounds that sound more like what I used to use that isn't around any more. I've been to the music store and tried out some things, because you never know what you'll find. When I started using fuzz, bass players didn't use effects – but as a guitarist I had no problem with experimenting, I try to find stuff that is close to what I hear in my head. I don't use compression, just natural dynamics, and I use a volume pedal. I mostly use my fingers and the way I'm playing to create dynamics."

"LAST NIGHT, I WAS HAVING AS MUCH, IF NOT MORE, FUN THAN THE AUDIENCE. I WAS HAVING A BALL AND I LOVE IT LIKE THAT"

Larry is regularly seen with his four-string Moon bass, nicknamed Sunshine. He also has a matching five-string, Moonshine, but we rarely see Larry doing his thing with the bigger beast. Does he ever dip his toe in the lower-end waters? "Not for live shows," he answers. "When I play I'm on autopilot, so I don't have to think about it, but if you add the fifth string, I would have to think about it and then I'm not just focused on entertaining. I use it on records and playing with other artists like Prince or Chaka Khan. I actually love using a five-string, but it depends on what hat I'm wearing."

When Larry designed his Moon Jazz bass, what refinements did he incorporate into the design? "Mostly the DI clip, the forward angled pickup and the original wireless setup," he says. "When I first went to Moon, their representative, Fumi, showed me the diffferent things they were capable of building. I had things in my head that I liked from Jazz basses and Musicman and G&L basses, so I mixed up all of that with them, and that's what we came up with." So does he still get other basses sent to him to try? "Warwick has approached me," he reveals, "and they're working on a signature model, which is cool. I'm not stuck on anything in particular; I'm open to anything that is cool and works for me."

With a career spanning over six decades, where does Larry draw his influences and inspiration from? "Well, first what helps me stay grounded spiritually is to do what is pleasing in God's eyes," he explains. "So that helps me to avoid anything that might harm me, emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. I used to try and fool myself that something was good for me, but realistically, I try to please God first. I'm blessed with a wonderful wife, and in 38 years together, we've only been apart for two days. She's there to support me and cover my back. Our family are very close and we see them all the time: the little ones keep us well grounded and focused.

"So much can drag you down, which is why we called the album *Raise Up*, to raise above all that. If I'm happy in my heart, it comes out in the music. Last night, I was having as much, if not more, fun than the audience: I was having a ball and I love it like that. It's a fun thing and I try to draw off the love and energy of others and give it back. I don't take anything for granted."

Raise Up is out now. www.larrygraham.com

Johan L., quality check guitar

www.thomann.de
thomann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

Tutorial Section

WELCOME TO *BGM'S* SUITE OF BASS TUTORIALS, ARRANGED BY LEVEL AND WRITTEN EXCLUSIVELY FOR OUR MAGAZINE BY A TOP INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF BASS PROFESSIONALS. WANT TO BE A KILLER BASS PLAYER? THIS IS THE PLACE TO START...

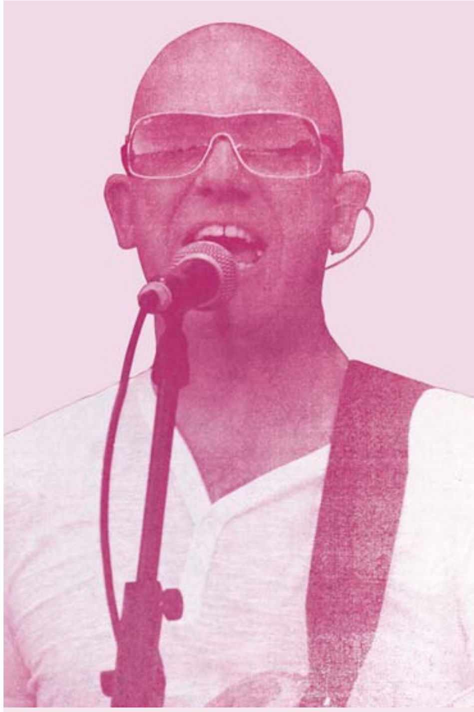
Looking for tips on how to improve your bass playing? Then you've arrived at exactly the right place. Now that you've been through all those amazing gear reviews and artist interviews, it's time to apply the wisdom of *Bass Guitar Magazine's* elite clan of bass educators to your playing. Buckle up!

Now, if you're anything like us, the thought of working on your bass playing might be a bit off-putting. We know: rocking out on stage is often more appealing than sitting down to work on your theory and technique. But you know what? Work on those things with our expert help and you'll rock out better, because you'll be a better player, more confident and more in control. That's the clever way to do it.

As in *Bass Guitar Magazine*, we've arranged our tuition into colour-coded sections depending on your level. We make things easy, splitting the education into beginner, intermediate and advanced levels, but we don't want you to overthink this or worry about which level to go for: this is all about self-improvement, so you may find elements for you at all three levels. We've also clarified the process by dividing each level of ability into theory and technique, enabling you to focus in on exactly what you need. Go to it, and remember – this is supposed to be fun. Enjoy it!

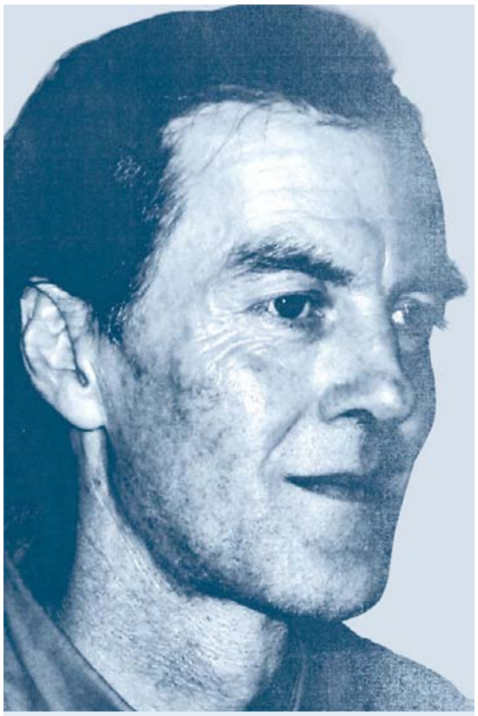
Jack Stevens graduated from the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts in 2005 and has gone on to play bass with the likes of Craig David, Simon Webbe and Mick Hucknall. He is currently working with Chris McDonald and Shane Beales.
www.jackstevensbass.com

JACK STEVENS BEGINNER'S THEORY



Paul Geary attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston and the Musicians' Institute of Technology. He also heads up the Academy Of Contemporary Music's bass school.
www.paulgeary.com

PAUL GEARY BEGINNER'S TECHNIQUES

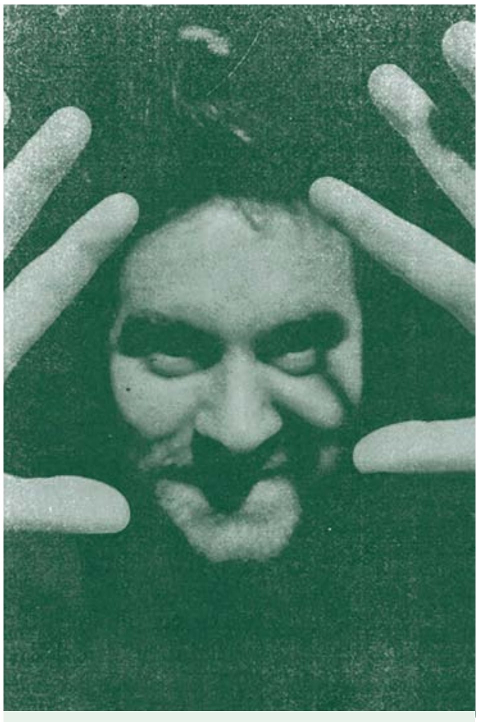


Rob Statham has amassed over 25 years as a professional freelance bass player. He has played in a wide range of musical settings, including jazz, blues, prog and classical, and he has taught for the past three years at Tech Music School.

ROB STATHAM INTERMEDIATE TECHNIQUES

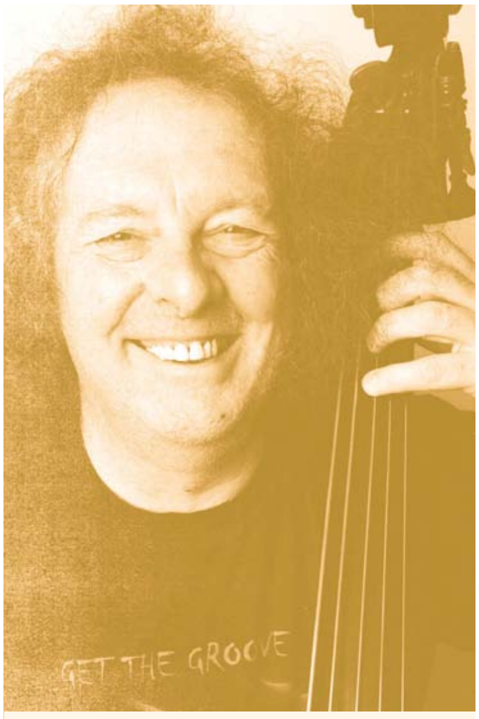
A member of the Institute's visiting bass faculty, Janek Gwizdala is a solo recording artist, musical director for Capitol recording artist VV Brown, and sideman to the likes of Mike Stern, Randy Brecker, Delta Goodrem, Airto and Pat Metheny.
www.janekbass.com

JANEK GWIZDALA INTERMEDIATE TECHNIQUES



Dave Marks's playing and recording credits span a wide range of bands and artists. His time is spread between the Rick Parfi tt Jnr band, his 'RhythmMatters' masterclasses and Thriller Live at the West End.
www.davebasslessons.com

DAVE MARKS ADVANCED TECHNIQUES



David Etheridge studied double bass at the Royal College of Music. Since then he's worked with musicians as diverse as Nigel Kennedy and Martin Taylor. David teaches double and electric bass and is the MD of two big bands and a 55-piece jazz orchestra.

DAVID ETHERIDGE UPRIGHT CITIZEN

Kev Sanders is a freelance electric and double bassist who has gigged and recorded with many artists. As well as numerous BBC radio and television sessions, he's played over 4,000 live gigs. He is the head of Bass Studies at AMS.
www.kevsanders.com

KEVIN SANDERS I WANT TO PLAY LIKE

JACK STEVENS

JACK STEVENS INTRODUCES THE BUDDING BASSIST TO THE PLEASURES AND PITFALLS OF THE LOW END

To kick this column off, I'll be giving you some tips and suggestions for getting comfortable on your bass guitar. What we're intending to create here is a resource for a mixture of players, from complete novices to those who want to refresh their basic knowledge. Potentially, these chapters could be used in your own teaching method.

First things first: apologies in advance to our left-handed readers for the slight bias towards your right-handed counterparts. Our exercises are also geared towards the four-string bass, but you can use these as starting blocks should you have an extended-range instrument.

My first lesson involved singing into a pickup, in an attempt to ascertain whether or not it was just a glorified microphone – thanks for that one, Marc Meggido, my bass teacher for many years. My route to bass was simple: my older sister suggested to me that in order to be a more sought-after musician, I should take up the bass rather than guitar in secondary school. She was right! It was only after studying the bass for some time – and I'm sure that this is the same for other players out there – that I began to appreciate the fundamentals and the role of the bass within music. I also found myself exposed to, and enjoying, a whole new array of musical genres within which the bass plays an important role.

As a teacher, whenever I've started with a student who's new to the instrument, the first things I like to deal with are:

Understanding your role as a bassist
A quick warm-up
Hand positions
The geography of the bass fingerboard

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE AS A BASSIST

It's a good idea to know what you're dealing with. Listen to songs that illustrate the function of the bass guitar (or bass synth) within contemporary music. Tracks like 'My Girl' (The Temptations), 'Dance Wiv Me' (Dizzee Rascal) and 'Billie Jean' (Michael Jackson) are great examples of the harmonic, melodic and rhythmical role the bass can play. I always try and latch on to the musical tastes of my students by finding basslines within their preferred genres.

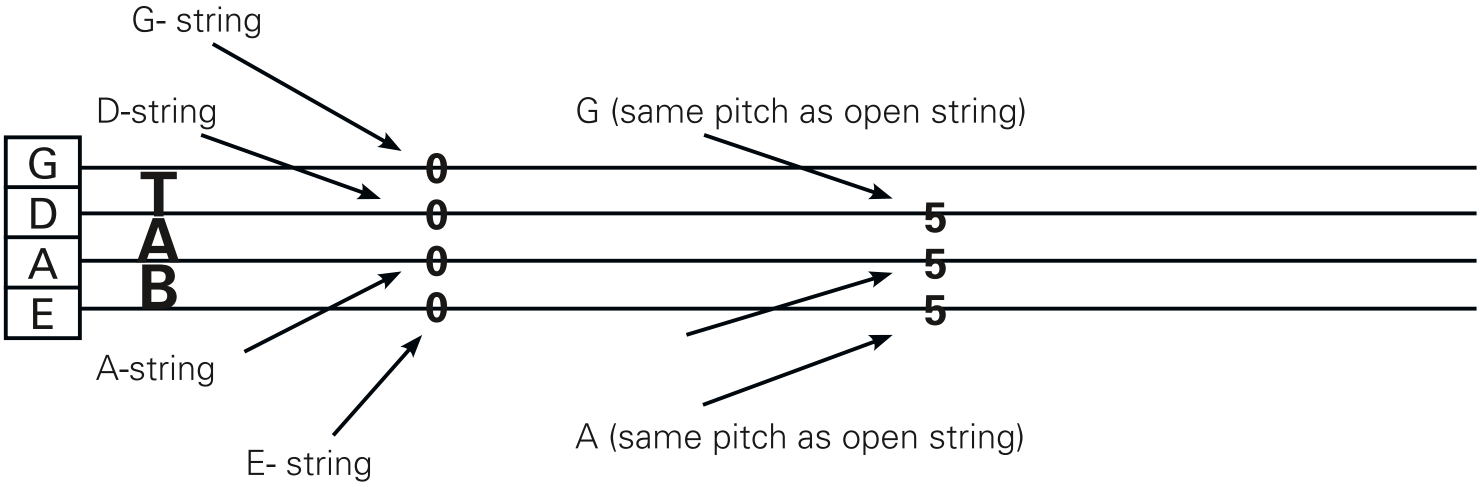
WARMING UP

One way that I've found to get the blood circulating into your hands and arms, is simply just to shake them out a bit until they feel less tense. It's crucial that you don't start playing the bass with any discomfort. Firstly, you're likely to cause yourself some pain or an injury, and secondly, you won't have much endurance. So always warm up!

HAND POSITIONS

If you cup both your knees with each hand, you'll make a C shape with your fingers and thumb. See *figure one.* Transferring this hand shape to the bass (*figure two*) is an ideal starting point for fingerstyle technique: we'll look at other ways of utilising the right hand in future columns. Your fretting/left hand should cup the neck of the bass with its thumb placed in the centre of the back of the neck, to act as an anchor and to help you pivot with your fingers or glide up to higher frets or down to lower ones. These approaches can be applied when both sitting or standing. See *figure three.*

Think about where to rest your thumb if you're playing fingerstyle. With your right hand, you're going to be taking your index and middle finger for a walk across the strings, so rest their tips on the appropriate string, and rest your thumb on either the lowest (in pitch) string available, the most convenient pickup, or anchor it on the body. See *figure four.*



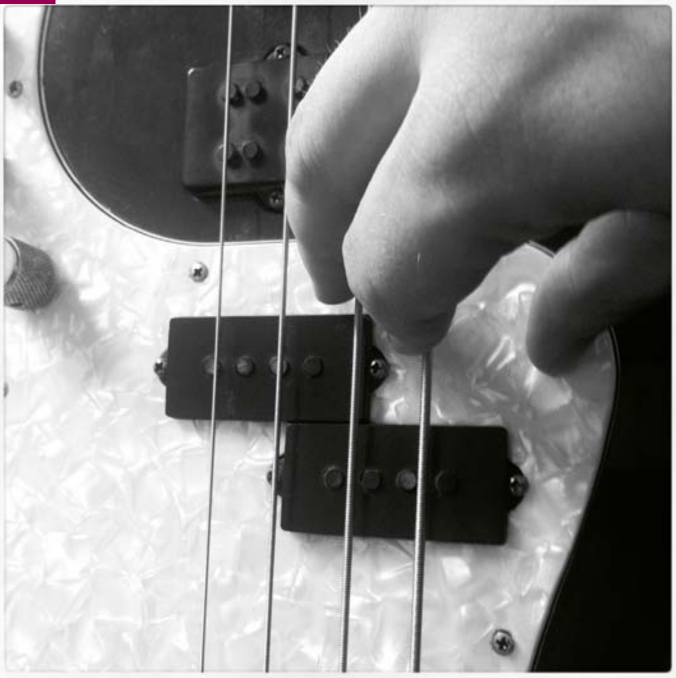
Extending your tone life

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4



GEOGRAPHY OF THE FINGERBOARD

The geography of the fingerboard is something that every player should know inside out. It not only gives you confidence, but opens up your note choice options. The diagram on the previous page shows a couple of key basics in the layout of a standard bass neck: the open strings (you really can't afford not to know their names), and the fifth frets of the E, A and D strings, which share the same note value as the open string above.

This is useful for tuning. Take note of the way that tablature follows conventional notation by having the lowest pitch at the bottom.

like no other string.

Elixir strings

GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

PAUL GEARY

PAUL GEARY, SESSION LEGEND AND BASS GURU AT THE ACADEMY OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, LAYS DOWN SOME INTRODUCTORY RULES FOR SLAPPING...

This column will focus on introducing bass players to the world of slapping. This is a technique that every bass player should have a go at. It's great fun and puts the bass a little more upfront in the mix. It is essential to have some of this down, whatever your personal preference, as it is a technique that has infiltrated many styles of music, not just funk.

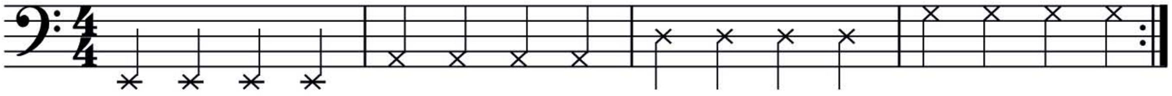
It's very important to understand that with this style you have to focus on rhythm, time and groove, rather than just licks and fills. There is nothing worse than hearing slap bass with no hook or groove – it then becomes what I call a guitar shop lick for testing an amplifier! Check out some of the great slap players of our time – Larry Graham, Louis Johnson, Marcus Miller, Victor Wooten, Mark King… the list could go on and on. With this in mind, you should always practise with a metronome, or even better a drum machine: at this point you are more of a drummer than a bassist.

I would like to begin with purely rhythm, so all of the examples this month are to be played with your fretting hand placed over all the strings to dampen them. Set your metronome to 80BPM and increase it to 120BPM as you improve your time and groove. On the notation, T means thumb and P means pluck. Remember, be ruthless with yourself and stay in the pocket at all times!

SLAP BASS BASICS

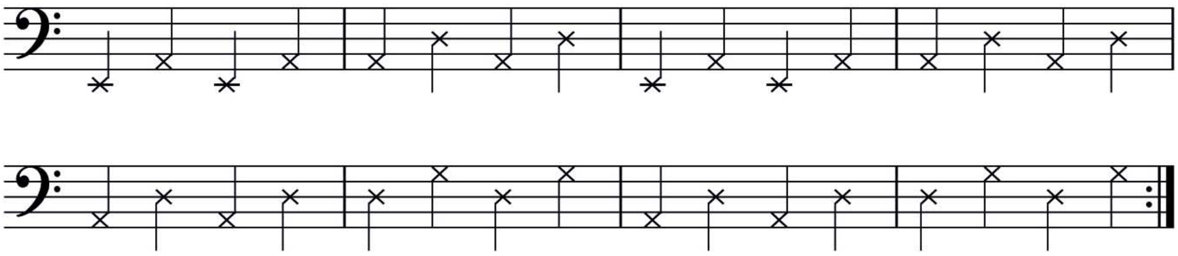
Example 1

Example one is a single-string exercise using the thumb and index finger to pull off. Use the side of your thumb to hit the string and then pull away using your index finger and wrist. Don't be tempted to use only your finger on your plucking hand: use your wrist and arm in a rocking motion to pull away from the body of your bass. Be consistent about where you hit the string; I find the best place is just before the first fret after your neck pick-up.



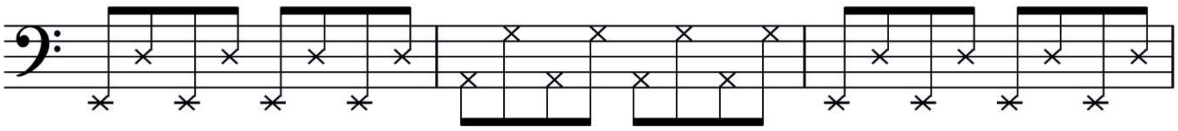
Example 2

Here we can start to move on to two strings. Again, move across the neck, making sure you are in time and hitting the strings consistently. If you've tried this technique before, you may be finding it tricky to hit only single strings or two strings. This is great practice, as we begin to move on to fills and more melodic lines. Keep the quarter notes even, in time with the metronome, and work across the strings in groupings of EA, AD, DG.



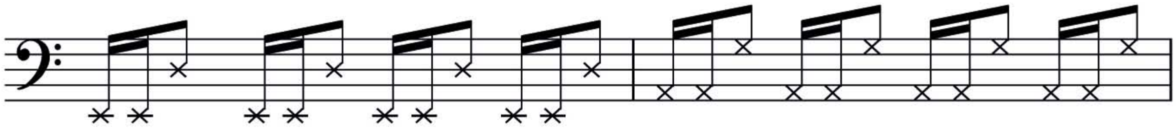
Example 3

Example three is the octave shape. This is your 'bread and butter' slap bass shape, using the E and D strings and A and G, across the neck. Again, make sure the eighth notes are consistent and even with the pulse. This will programme your fingers on your picking hand to remember the string spaces and develop into a motor skill that you don't have to think about.



Example 4

I would like to try a double thumb on a sixteenth note, still using the octave shape. Again, alternate between the E and D strings and A and G, keeping your fretting hand muted over all strings.

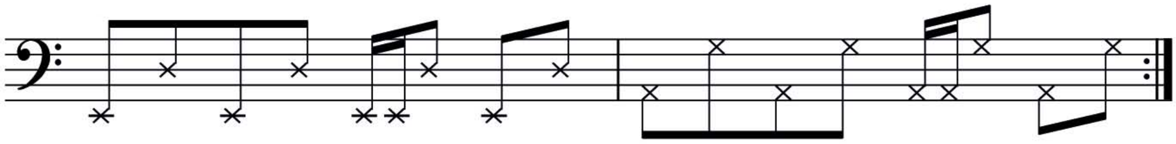


Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.
Elixir® strings
GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

icon
Basses
4 · 5 · 6
Made in USA
Steel Pulse
Amlak Tafari
MADE IN U.S.A.
CARVIN
carvinworld.com
UK dealers
Bass Gear Ltd
44 01189 706925
bassgear.co.uk
Rock Star Guitar
0121 439 9662
rockstarguitar.co.uk
Sound Unlimited
0208 123 2477
soundunlimited.co.uk
Knighton Music
01547 528529
knightonmusiccentre.com
Mid Air Music
01634 846 886
midairmusic.com

Example 5

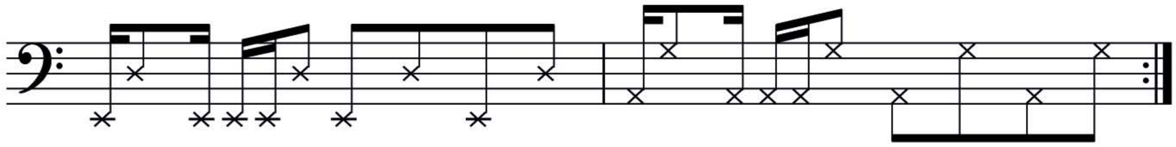
Example five is a mixture of eighth- and sixteenth-note rhythms, with a double thumb thrown in for good measure. You can adapt all of these exercises to however many strings you have.

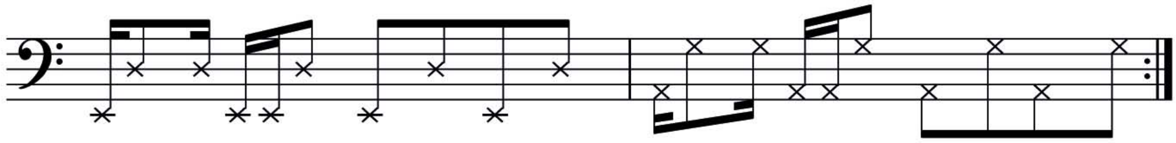


Example 6a and 6b

These next two examples are where the rhythm gets a bit tricky. Watch out for that common figure sixteenth, eighth, sixteenth in the first bar, followed by a double thumb. Ouch!

Again, use the exact same rhythm on the A and G strings. On *example six-b* I use a double pluck: just pull off twice with the index finger of your picking hand.





Consistent pulse, groove and rhythm are essential in any style of bass playing, but never more so than in slap bass. Make sure the exercises above are all played in time. Next month we will begin to add pitches to some slap grooves.

Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.
Elixir® strings
GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

Bass
Guitar Magazine

DON'T MISS AN ISSUE
SUBSCRIBE TODAY

SAVE MONEY BY SUBSCRIBING TO THE UK'S NUMBER ONE BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE,
AND GET EVERY ISSUE DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR.

Keep up-to-date for current offers and free gifts

DIGITAL EDITIONS AVAILABLE ON iPAD, iPHONE AND ANDROID

pocketmags.com Available on the iPhone App Store

www.bassguitarmagazine.com T: 01926 339808

JACK STEVENS

SCALE AWAY WITH JACK AS HE CONTINUES HIS SERIES FOR BASS BEGINNERS

In this month's column we're going to be looking at the major scale and how it fits in with our exploration into the fundamentals of bass playing. As I always say to my students, not only does the major scale aid in developing economy of movement (in other words, getting around the fingerboard without too much hard work), but it also helps us to understand how an array of musical ideas work both melodically and tonally.

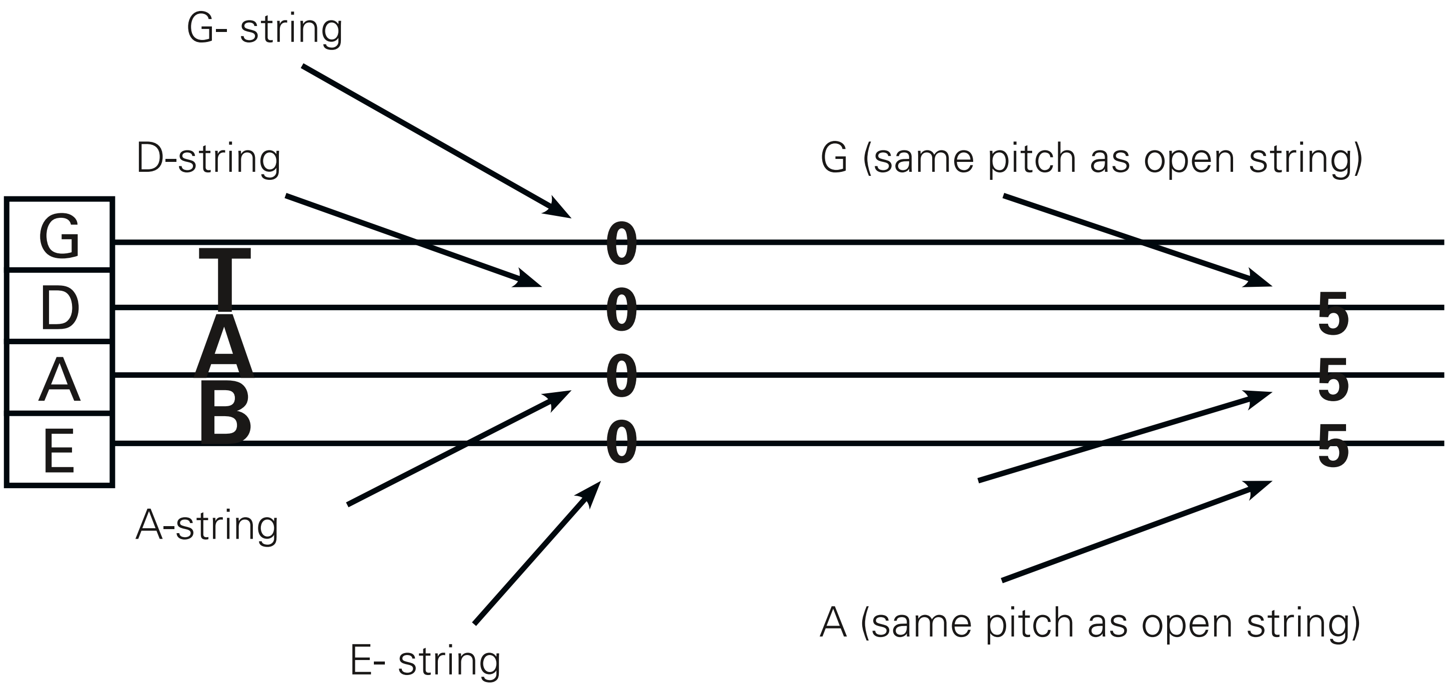
Firstly, what is the major scale and how can it be of use to us? Well, if you aren't familiar with this term – and there's no shame in admitting it – I'd be surprised if you didn't recognise the sound of this scale. The first six notes of the infamous Eastenders theme tune are also the first 6 notes – ascending – of an Eb-major scale. In fact, the whole melody is constructed upon that same pool of notes.

You probably also know 'My Baby Just Cares For Me' by Nina Simone. If you can sing that opening bass-line, then you can effectively sing most of a descending major scale. The same can be said for the chorus bass-line of the Jackson Five's classic 'I Want You Back'. The major 7th interval of this scale can also be heard in full effect in British soul legend Omar's 'There's Nothing Like This'.

An old, but useful, explanation of this scale is that, if you play from any C note on a piano keyboard up to the next available one, using only the white keys, you'll have played the major scale. Very simply, a scale is a sequence of notes made up of a specific order of intervals, known as tones and semi-tones. Moving up a bass neck, fret by fret, is the same as moving semi-tone by semi-tone (commonly referred to as 'chromatically'). The major scales are constructed of seven notes, with the eighth note (the octave) being the point in which the pattern begins again. The major scale is also known as the Ionian mode.

A major scale can start on any note, but must follow the same construction of intervals for it to be 'major'. In terms of tones and semi-tones, this would be tone, tone, semi-tone, tone, tone, tone, semi-tone. Each note of any scale has its own characteristics. The major scales are root, major 2nd, major 3rd, perfect 4th, perfect 5th, major 6th and major 7th.

Diagram time! *Figure one* is our C major scale. We can play this in more than one position, but we'll start here for now. Take note of the suggested fingerings above each note position. Try playing this scale while alternating your right-hand fingers: index followed by middle finger and so forth (do it slowly!). If this is a bit of a struggle, take exactly the same pattern and begin on the eighth fret of the E string. This particular fingering pattern is one of the more versatile of the one-octave major scale shapes, and can be moved as desired as long as you start on the E or A strings. *Figures two* and *three* show the slight variations that you'll need for playing this scale starting on either the open E or A strings, or their respective first frets (F major and Bb major). Have fun, and I'll see you next month!



Extending your tone life

Figure 1

Figure 2

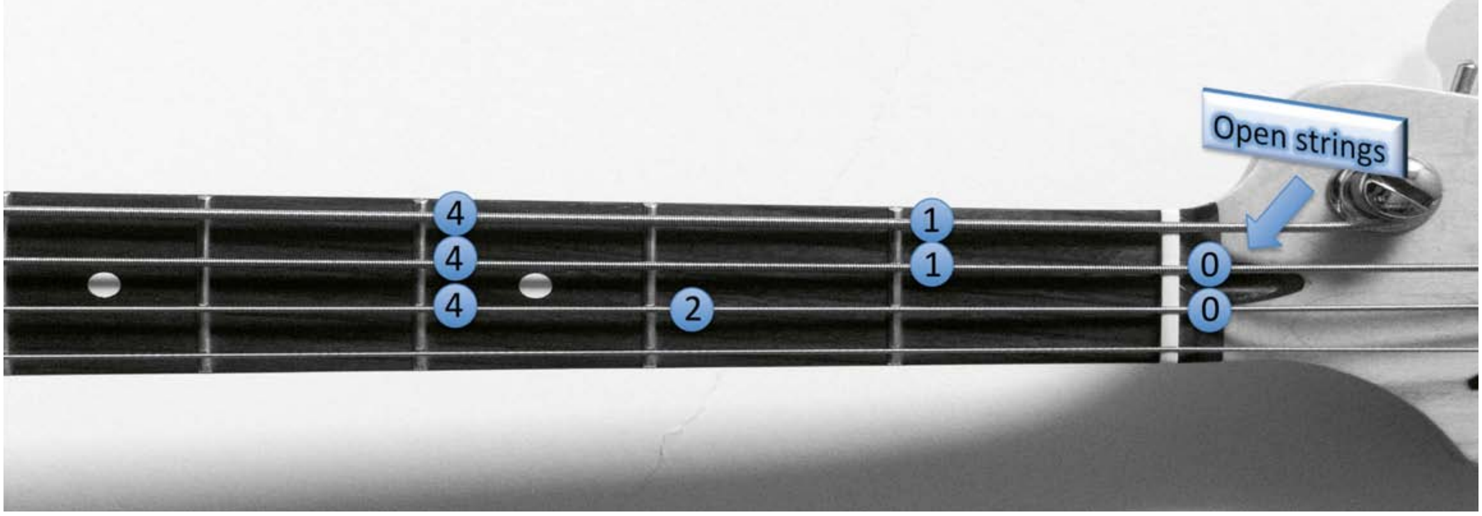
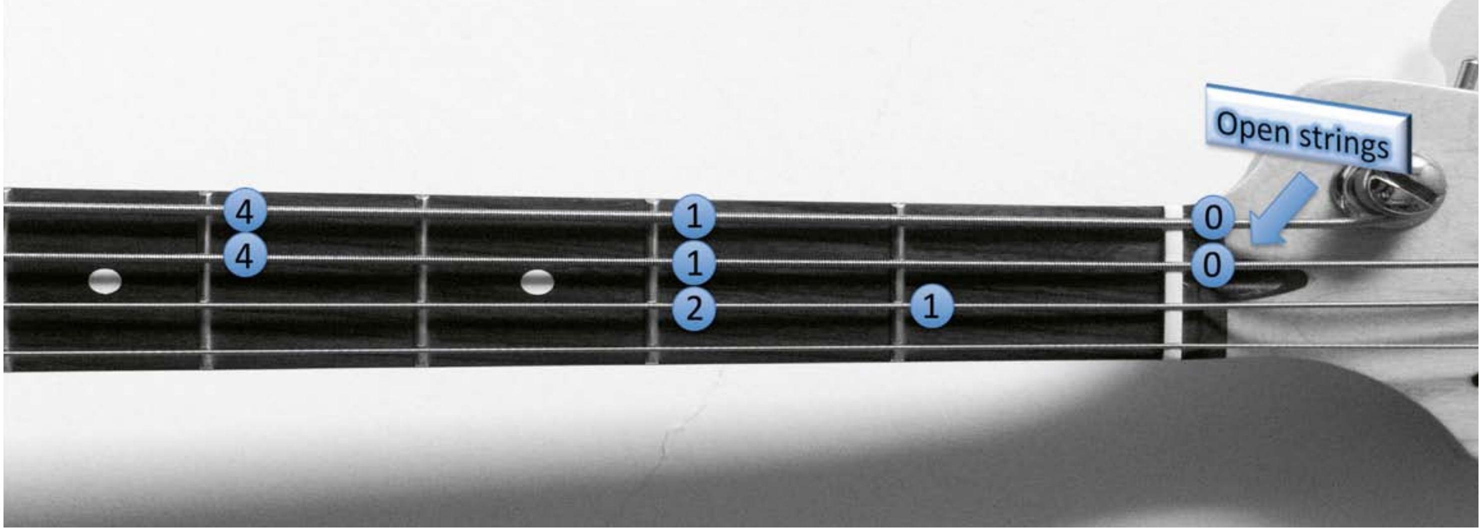


Figure 3



PAUL GEARY

PAUL GEARY, SESSION MASTER AND BASS GURU AT THE ACADEMY OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, TALKS CHORDS – VOCAL CORDS . . .

When I was studying bass at the Musicians' Institute Of Technology in California, one of my professors asked the whole class how many singers we had. Hardly any hands went up. This didn't go down too well. It was a bass course after all; 'I don't need to be able to sing,' I thought. How wrong could I have been?

The fact is, when you go into any teaching facility to study your discipline, whether it's bass, guitar, drums, voice, music production or keyboards, it's important to understand that you want to graduate as a rounded musician: it's not just about being a good bass player. I've found it very valuable over the years to be able to play a little keyboards, guitar and drums, albeit at a basic level. Of all the extra skills I've learned, being able to sing has been the most important tool.

Learning to play other instruments helps you to understand where to put the bass within songs, because it makes you think about the spaces that other instruments create. It also helps when you have to instruct a guitarist or drummer as a music director. You don't want to be a jack of all trades, master of none, but understanding other instruments – especially the voice – can make you a better bass player and, most importantly, get you the gig. In general, the bass player who can do backing vocals will always win out over the bass player who can't.

Some gigs I've had to do have involved not only singing but playing synth bass on keyboards. A few years ago I was playing for a boy band called Another Level, and shortly after that another called A1. Both gigs consisted of about 80 per cent synth bass and 20 per cent bass guitar. You can always get a MIDI pickup for your bass guitar, but it won't feel or sound the same. Learn the line on keys: sometimes it's the only way to truly reproduce a song. At first, try singing over simple eighth-note rhythms. Then try basic syncopation. This will be the start of a whole new area of playing.

Bass will always be the hardest instrument to sing with. More often than not you have to play something completely different to the melody, and then you need to be able to sing across the rhythm. It's far easier to strum a guitar and sing, but once you start to do this with bass, you'll want to do it more and more.

I cut my teeth in working men's clubs in the north. I've come to look upon those dates as my apprenticeship. In these situations, you really start to grow. I remember one night in Grimethorpe, when I was getting ready to go on stage, all I could hear was shouting, whooping and the odd breaking glass, from the audience out front. I was scared! The entrance to the stage from the dressing room was a large staircase and at the top there was a big archway. Just before you emerged in front of the audience, on the arch above your head was some graffiti of a huge lion with its jaws open. The words 'Christians this way' had been crossed out, replaced with 'band this way'. The last band to play here had obviously drawn a comparison with the Romans leading the slaves out to be fed to the lions… just what you want to see before you kick into 'Midnight Hour'.

If I hadn't been singing that night, the crowd would have swallowed me up for sure. The band at the time was a simple four-piece, so it was all hands on deck to help out with singing. Another important factor, of course, is that if all of the band-members can sing, your band can stay small – and obviously there will be more money to go around at the end of the night.

Try these simple vocal tips, courtesy of voice coach Sarah Geary.

BREATHE

It's important to keep a steady flow of air and let your breathing respond naturally to the words you are about to sing. Breathe in and out over counts of 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12. Breathing must be continuous, like a spinning wheel. Only pause between breaths if you need to, never during them.

LIP TRILLS

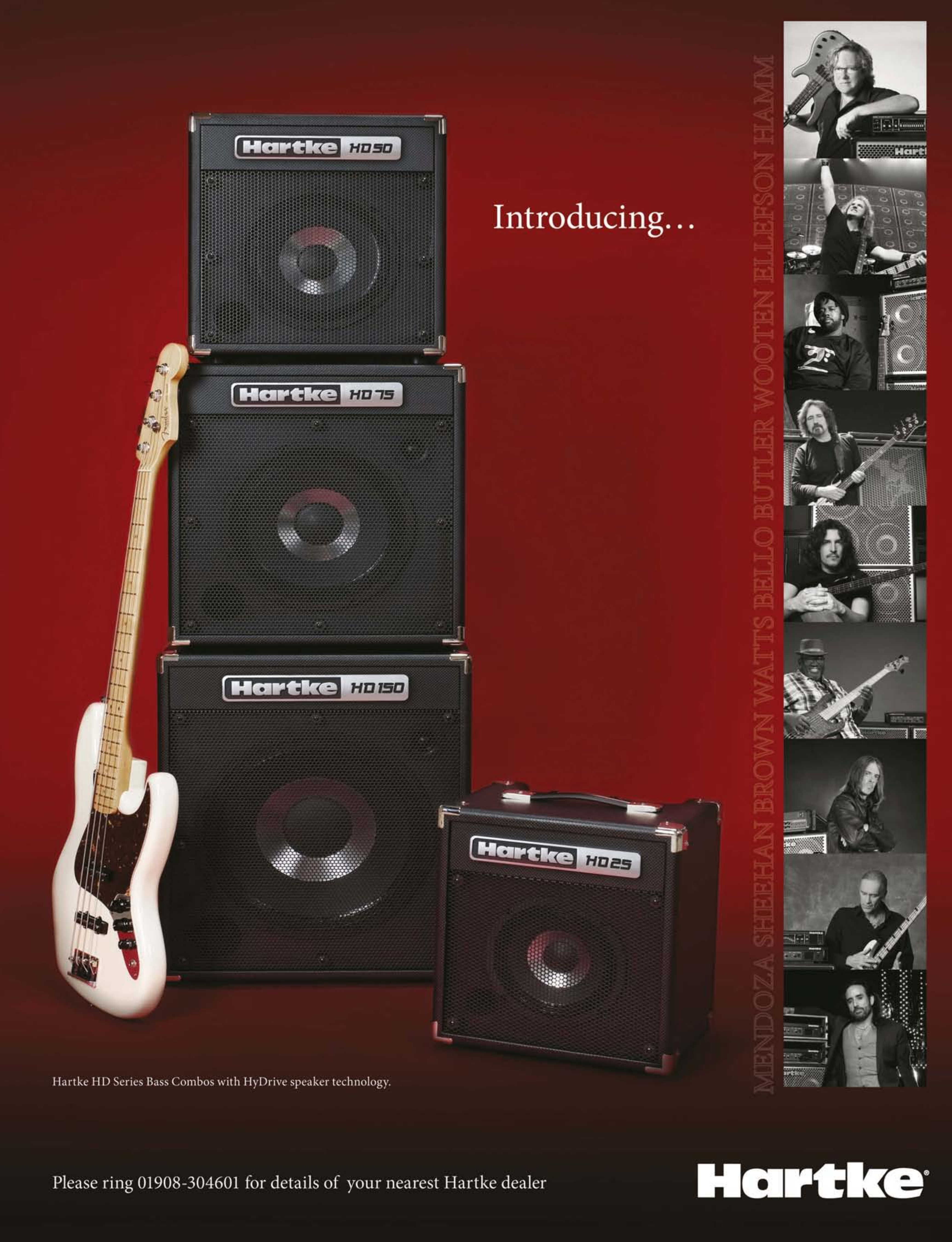
Place your lips together and imitate the sound of a car engine revving up. Try a silent breath, then a single pitch. You can also try this with your bass. Once you have this down, move up a scale. Experiment with the sound from high to low, low to high, then softer, louder, slower and faster. Remember to keep the 'brrr' sound going all the time.

VOWELS

Try singing pitches to the vowel sounds 'Ah', 'Oo' and 'Ee', taking each vowel in turn. Hold each note for a count of four before moving onto the next tone. Aim to keep the note true and keep breathing throughout. How does it sound? What's the tone like?

Give it a go… You know you want to! Once you start, you won't be able to stop.

Enjoy being a more complete musician.


Hartke HD50
Hartke HD75
Hartke HD150
Hartke HD25
Introducing…
MENDOZA SHEEHAN BROWN WATTS BELLO BUTLER WOOTEN ELLEFSON HAMM
Hartke HD Series Bass Combos with HyDrive speaker technology.
Please ring 01908-304601 for details of your nearest Hartke dealer
Hartke®

ROB STATHAM

ROB STATHAM LOOKS INSIDE BASS CHORDS AND REVEALS A WHOLE WORLD OF HARMONIC POSSIBILITIES

Chords played on the bass can be a very effective colour and can offer us more possibilities in small band arrangements, so it might be worthwhile considering some available options for common chords. If we look at three chord types – minor seven, dominant seven, and major seven – then two obvious possibilities for each type present themselves: root, third, and seventh; or root, seventh and third. In fact, you are quite possibly familiar with these particular shapes already as they are commonly used. In the first example I have arranged them as two ways to play a II-V-I chord progression, thus covering the two types of voicing for each chord type. Notice how the third and seventh of the minor seven chord become, with just one note moving a semitone, the seventh and third of the dominant seven chord. Economical voice leading such as this makes for satisfyingly smooth changes between the chords.

But what other options might we have, bearing in mind that root, third, and seventh are usually considered the notes most essential to spell out the harmony? In fact, context is everything, and any of those essential notes may, at times, be omitted yet sufficiently implied given the appropriate context. The second example shows how we might play our three chord types with, perhaps counter-intuitively, the root note on the top of the voicing. The major seven version of this is both a bit of a stretch and also may be rather dissonant for some with the semitone interval, but as a passing chord in the right context it can be useful.

Also in the second example I've demonstrated how we might play a II-V pattern, moving between the minor seven chord with the root on the top and, by moving just one semitone, to the dominant seven chord with the fifth on top. This means that in the dominant seven chord there is no root note, though it is sufficiently implied in the context.

> "CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING, AND ANY OF THOSE ESSENTIAL NOTES MAY, AT TIMES, BE OMITTED YET SUFFICIENTLY IMPLIED GIVEN THE APPROPRIATE CONTEXT"

So now we have four new chord shapes beyond the six common shapes in the first example – each of our three types with the root on the top and also a dominant seven chord with the fifth on the top.

Let's consider just our two new dominant seven shapes, with the root or fifth on top. We can use these same shapes to represent a dominant seven chord a tritone away, that is, a flattened fifth or three whole tones away. We can think of this as a tritone substitution – for example F#7 for C7, the two chords sharing the same third and seventh – or as the same chord but with a different note on top, so now the dominant seven shape with the root on the top represents a dominant seven with the flattened fifth on top, and the dominant seven with the fifth on top becomes a dominant seven with a flattened ninth on top.

The third example shows how we might combine these voicings along with more common ones to give us four ways of playing a II-V-I in a minor key, in this case using a dominant chord as the II chord. Notice that by combining these different chord shapes we are able to create a line with good voice leading, in this case creating an overall descending pattern finally resolving on a minor triad. But by combining these and other voicings in different ways it would be equally possible to voice lead an ascending line – you only need to learn a relatively small number of new voicings to then be able to combine them in many different ways, creating many more options than you might imagine.

The final example is a blues in F which introduces just one more dominant seven shape which, as with the fifth and root on top, can also be used to represent a dominant chord a flattened fifth away. I have written the chords as half or whole notes, but when you get the shapes under your fingers you can interpret the piece with an appropriate swing feel.

The first bar has the root note on top, which becomes the fifth on the second bar, the IV chord, and back to the root on bar three as we return to the I chord.

The fourth bar has the top note raised a tone to become the ninth, this being our new dominant seven shape. This gives us a little variation on the two bars of F7, bars three and four, and also leads nicely to the seventh of the Bb7 chord on the fifth bar.

Again, to avoid repeating the same voicing on the sixth bar, also Bb7, I revert to our dominant seven shape with the fifth on top, which leads nicely to bar seven where we return to the I chord with the root on top, the same resolution as in bars two to three.

On the eighth bar we play a III-VI chord change, A minor 7 to D7, but on the D7 I have used the dominant seven shape which gives us the flattened fifth on top – or you could consider it as an Ab7 – providing a nice descending semitone line leading to the G minor 7 on bar nine with the root on top.

Bar 10, a C7, is our new shape again, the same one we used to represent an F7 in bar four, but now it's a tritone away in relation to the root and thus represents a C7 with an augmented fifth. Again this makes for smooth voice leading as we move to the

Extending your tone life

F7 on bar 11 with the third on top.

The last two bars are a turnaround, I-VI-II-V, and so the second half of bar 11 is a D7 with the augmented fifth on top, creating an ascending line against the harmony, and leading to the third on top on the G minor 7 chord in bar 12, the top note remaining the same for the C7 at the end of bar 12.

Using these same voicings it would be possible to play the same progression in many different ways depending on how we combine the chord shapes. This reinforces the point that, as we learn new chord shapes, we exponentially increase the possible combinations, creating many voice leading possibilities. This gives us the ability to play a descending line, an ascending line, or to stay in much the same area even as the chords change, thus ensuring plenty of potential variation in any chordal passages we might be required to play.

Figure 1

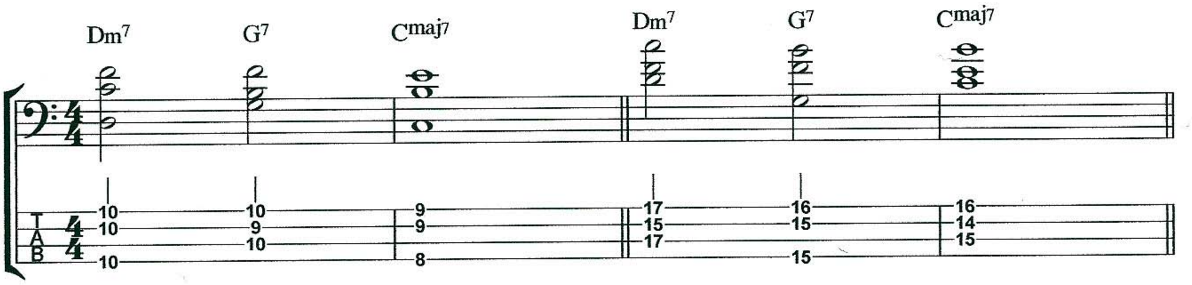


Figure 2

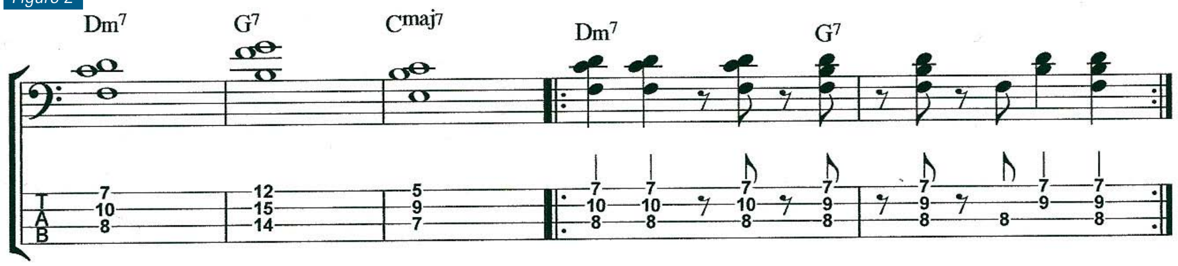


Figure 3

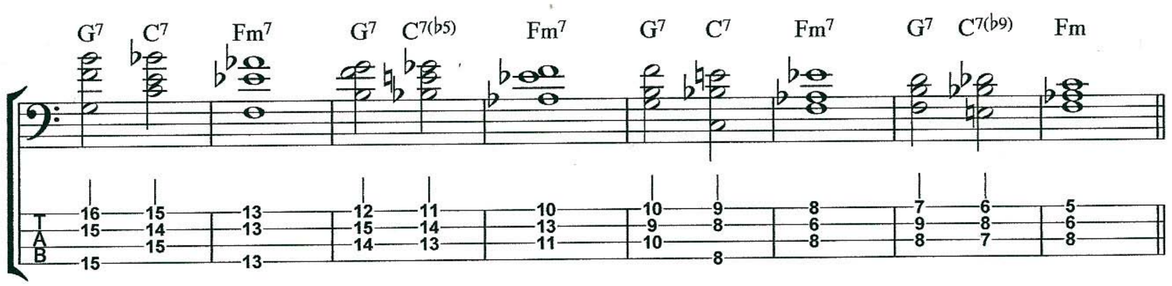
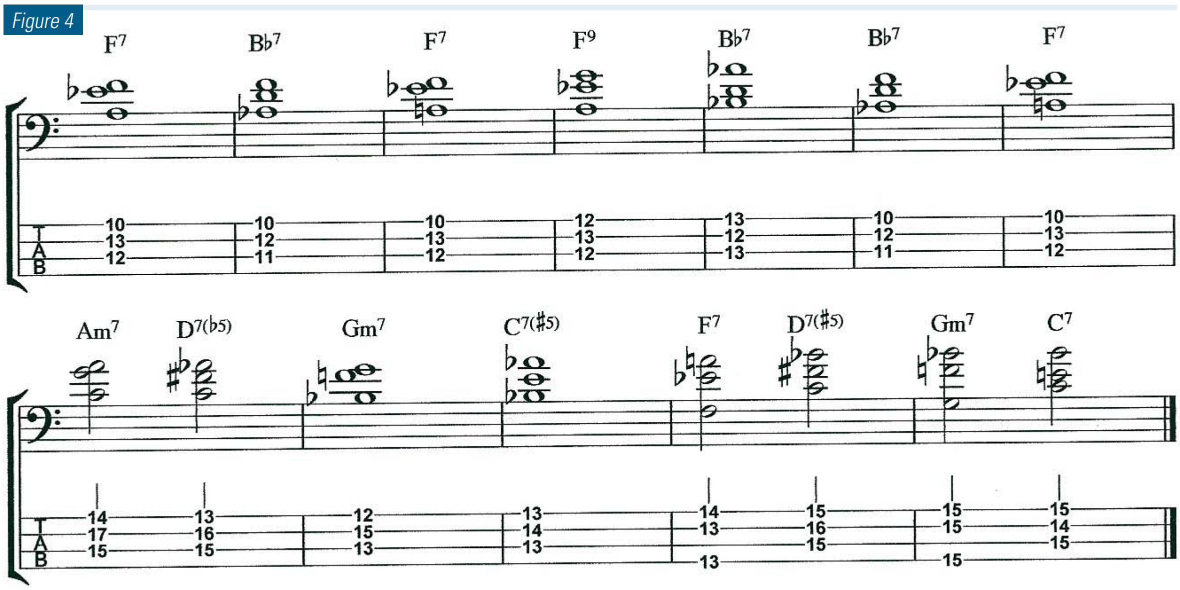


Figure 4



like no other string.

Elixir® strings

GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

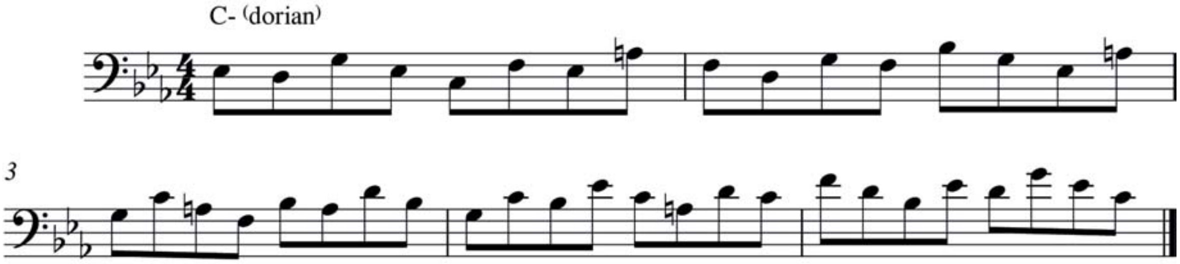
JANEK GWIZDALA

THE HARD SELL. OUR MAN GWIZDALA GETS ALL STERN ON US

Isn't learning from the world's best musicians cool? No, I'm not talking about me, before you shoot me any emails about my ego! I'm talking about a situation I found myself in at a soundcheck in Canada with Mike Stern and Bob Franceschini, trading ideas and working on harmony and melody. It's the kind of personal insight into a legend like Mike Stern that you can only experience by being in the right place and the right time, and I want to share it with you because he dropped a couple of pretty cool ideas on me.

We were talking about groupings of five notes, and coming up with cell ideas to practise. Mike suggested this idea, which I've aptly titled *Mike Stern idea one*, and it basically deals with a C minor Dorian scale, with groupings of five-note cells. I've written it out to cover an octave in C minor, but the first thing I encourage you to do once you've got it under your fingers is move it around the neck to all keys, and become completely fluent with it. As with any of these ideas, it's the fluid execution that's going to help it become a natural extension of your playing and not just another lick you rattle off from time to time.

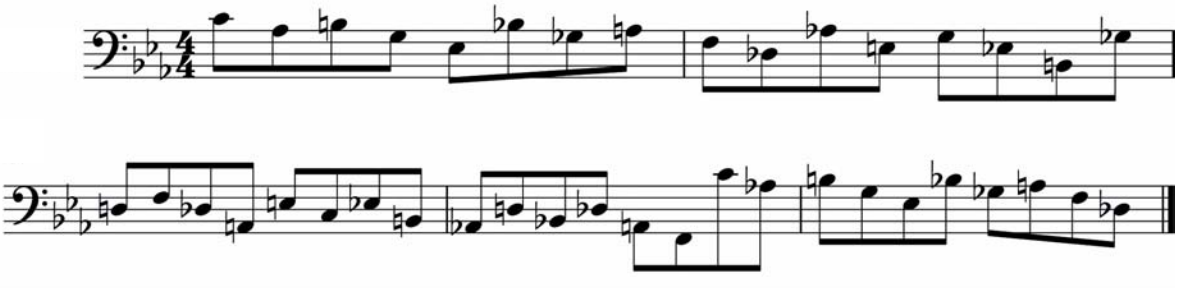
MIKE STERN IDEA ONE



The start of the first cell is a very simple outline of the minor triad, and once you are aware of where all the notes in a C minor scale land under your fingers through doing this exercise for a while, you're going to notice that you'll be able to come up with your own similar exercises and melodic devices and be creative with your practice and performance routine. I think it's the fluidity with which someone like Mike plays this material that really makes it special. The time feel, the sound, the context and the attitude are all just as, if not more, important than the notes themselves.

Mike Stern idea two again deals with a series of five-note cells, and this time it's a pattern that moves in minor seconds down the neck of the bass. There's no reason why you can't use whole steps or minor thirds, I'm just using half steps for the purpose of this example. Again, play this stuff slowly at first and get a real feel for where it fits under your fingers. Then have a think about where this material might be appropriate in your day-to-day playing, and work on incorporating it into other ideas you have, melodically and in solo terms.

MIKE STERN IDEA TWO

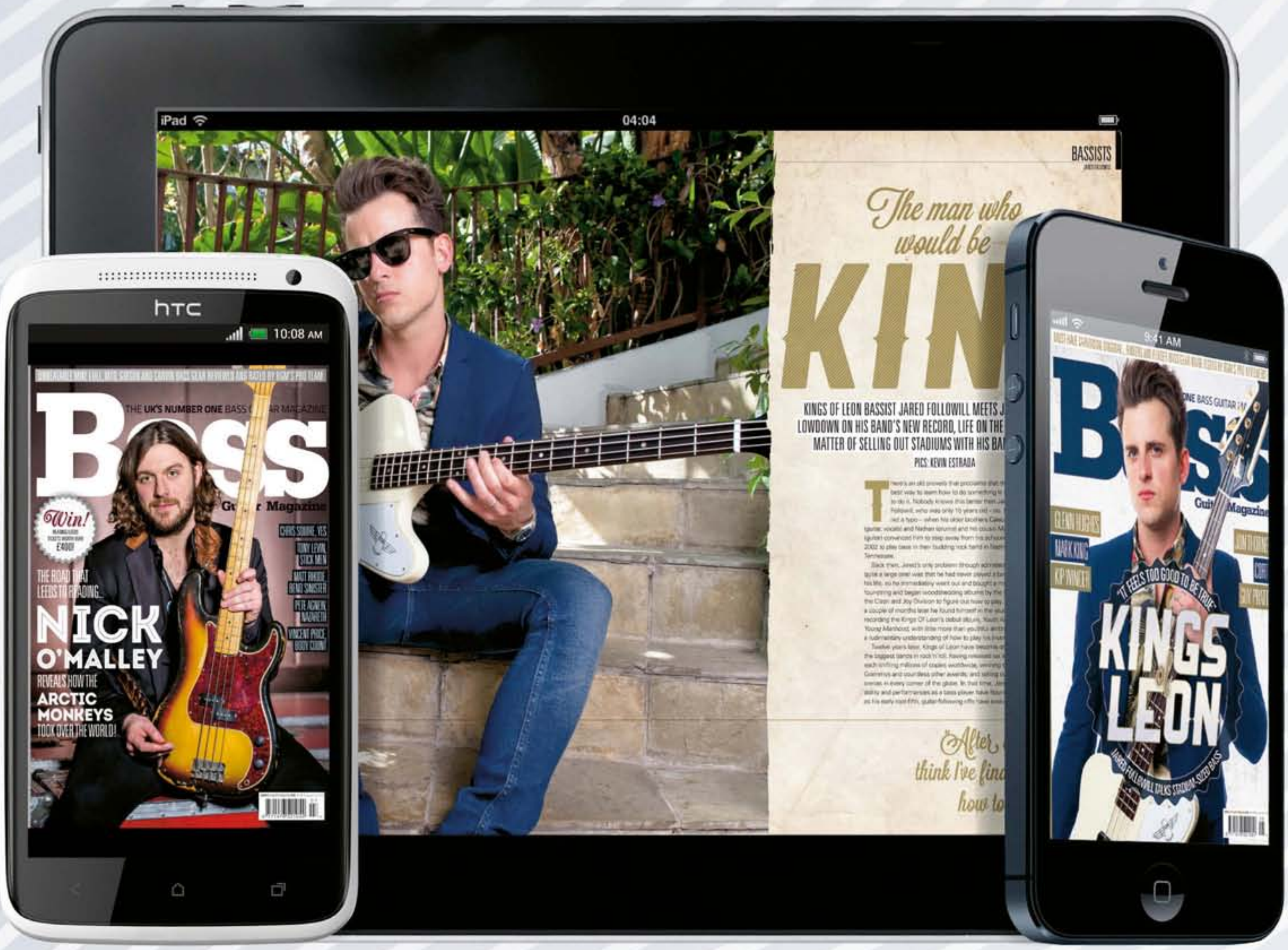


I was scrambling to write the idea down as soon as Mike had played it onstage during soundcheck, and before the gig I went back to the hotel to shed it a little. One thing I've noticed throughout my career is that I'm never successful when I try and play things on the gig the same night that I've been working on them that day. There's a lot to be said for really working on an idea and getting it into your subconscious before you make it an audible aspect of your performance. I also think that the longer you work on putting something into your muscle memory, the more natural it's going to sound when it comes out in the context of whatever music you're performing.

I hope this rocks for you, and gives you some ideas about adding material to your vocabulary and your practice routine. It was an instant hit for me, and I spent a good few days working on these ideas trying to figure out if there's a natural-sounding place in my music for this new vocabulary.

Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.
Elixir® strings
GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

Bass Guitar Magazine



DIGITAL EDITIONS

AVAILABLE ON iPAD,
iPHONE AND ANDROID

VISIT pocketmags.com

Available on the iPhone App Store

ROB STATHAM

ROB STATHAM CONTINUES TO EXPLORE THE HARMONIC OPTIONS WITHIN BASS CHORDS

Understanding and knowing where to find harmonics on the bass is a useful skill to develop, as these subtle sounds provide many ways to add colour. By combining harmonics to create chords, we can add harmonic depth to any ideas we might wish to play. This can be especially useful when, for instance, we are backing a guitarist with no other chordal instrument present, enabling us to harmonically underpin the guitarist.

The principle of harmonics is a well-understood physical property of a vibrating string, or column of air for that matter, in which overtones in harmony with the fundamental pitch are produced. Being able to isolate them and use them to play melodies or create chords opens up many possibilities, but knowing where to find the notes you want is not an entirely straightforward process with harmonics; they're not necessarily located above the fret of the same pitch, and, as you progress up the harmonic series, they deviate marginally from standard tuning and are not aligned exactly with a fret.

Figure 1

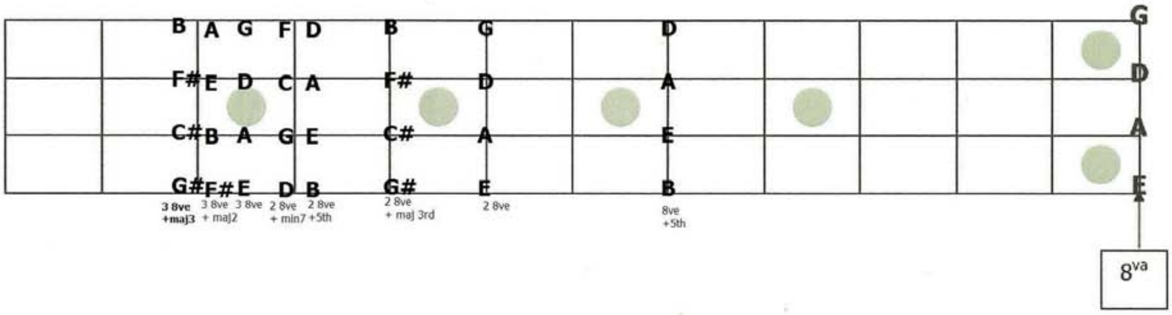
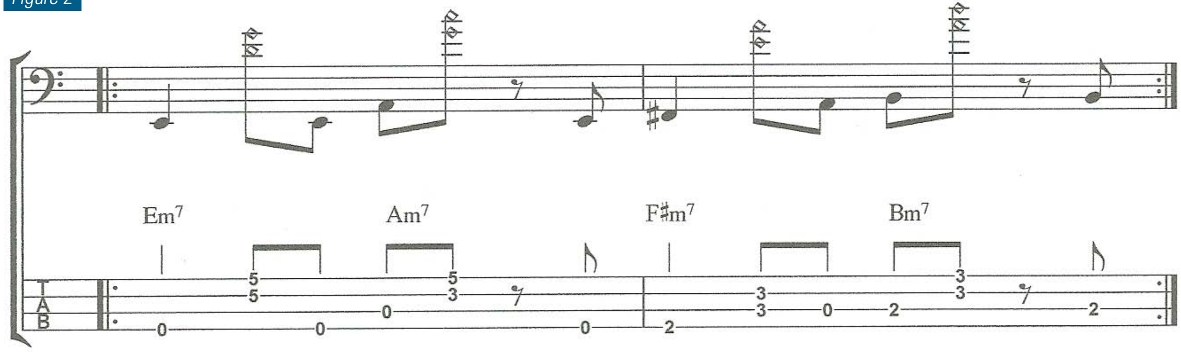


Figure 2



You most likely know already how such notes are produced, but in essence it is simply a matter of touching a string – yet not pressing the string down onto a fret or the fretboard itself – at certain points along the string's length. The resultant note has a bell-like pitch that can be several octaves above the instrument's natural range. The open string itself can be considered the first harmonic, also termed the fundamental, and the second harmonic is located at a point exactly halfway between the saddle of the bridge and the nut, also known as the twelfth fret – yes, it's there for a reason! The harmonic produced here is exactly the same pitch as the corresponding fretted note. The third harmonic is located above the seventh fret, a third of the length of the string, and sounds an octave and a fifth higher than the open string. In this instance the fretted note and the harmonic are the same note, if a different octave. This ceases to be true at the next harmonic in the series, the fourth, located above the fifth fret. The harmonic produced at this fret produces a tone two octaves above the open string, a G, for example, on our top string, not a C, the note we would be fretting over.

The next harmonic, the fifth in the series, is located over the fourth fret, and sounds two octaves and a major third above the open string, which is the same note, if a higher octave, as the fretted tone at the same fret. The sixth harmonic is the first to not align with a fret, falling just on the bridge side of the third fret; you might find you need to experiment a little to get the feel fof it. This harmonic produces a tone two octaves and a major fifth above the open string, and you may also have noticed that the fourth, fifth, and sixth harmonics produce the triad arpeggio of the open string on which they are played. Understanding this is a good way into thinking about melodic possibilities using harmonics.

Extending your tone life

In fact, we can take this one stage further when we consider the seventh harmonic, which falls just to the nut side of the third fret. This harmonic produces a tone two octaves and a minor seventh above the open string, the note F on the G string, and, added to the arpeggio created by the previous three harmonics, creates a dominant seventh arpeggio of the open string on which they are played.

Remembering how they relate to each other in this way is a good means of recalling which pitches they represent, as, by this stage, the tones produced are not related to fret position and, to say the least, it can be somewhat difficult to remember where each note lies. *Figure one* is a diagram to help you find all these tones and understand where they fall in relation to each other and also to the open string on which they are produced. As you can see, I have taken it even further, as far as the tenth harmonic, located just on the nut side of the second fret and producing a tone three octaves and a major third above the open string on which it is played. Up to this point we have, with some repetitions, the notes of a dominant ninth arpeggio of the open string. It is theoretically possible to tease out even higher tones, though not to any useful practical effect, but in fact as we continue up the harmonic series we would produce a dominant seven sharp eleven chord – nature's trying to tell us something here, but I'm not sure what!

Figure 3

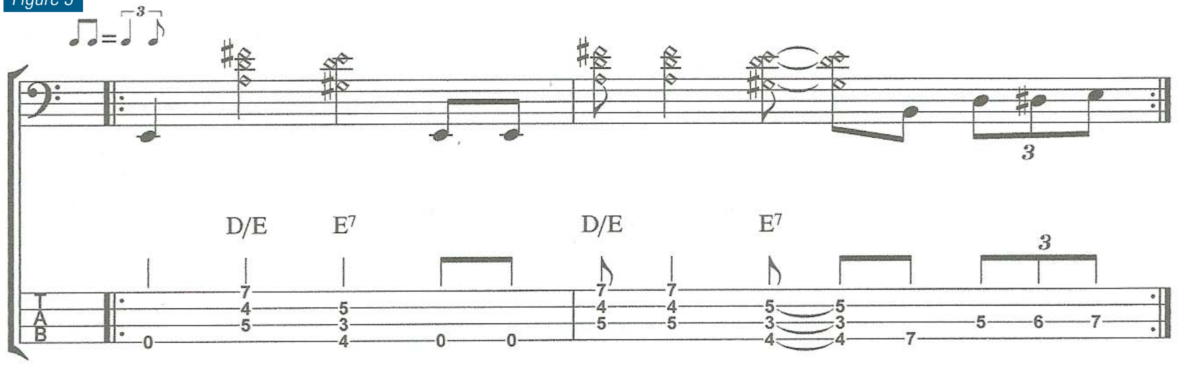
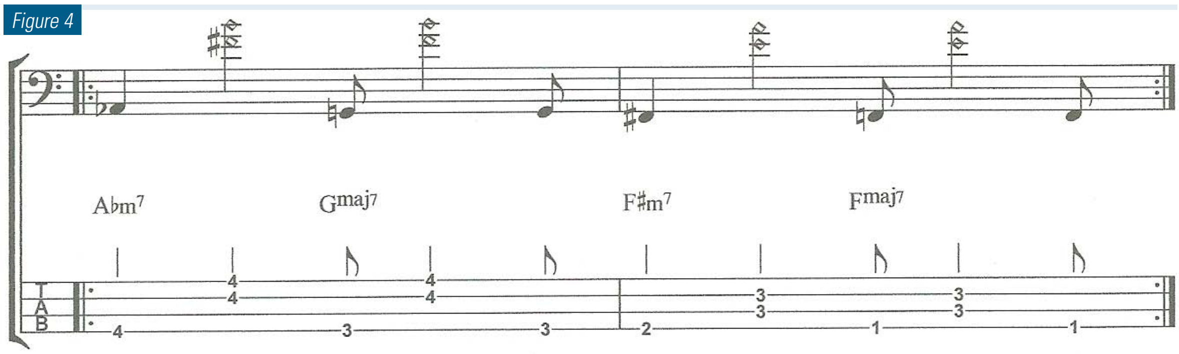


Figure 4



As the bass is tuned in fourths, combining two or more harmonics at the same position can, with an added fretted bass note, effectively spell out some useful chords with which to augment bass-lines, notably minor and major seventh chords. This is because the thirds and sevenths of major and minor seventh chords are a fourth apart, so by carefully selecting our fretted bass tone we can convey the intended chord, but we can also combine harmonics at different frets to add other intervals to the harmony.

You may already have noticed that if you play the harmonics at the fifth fret on the D and G strings while playing an E in the bass, then you are playing an E minor 7 chord. But if you were to play the open A string and change the harmonic on the D string to the seventh harmonic, just on the nut side of the third fret, then, along with the unchanged harmonic at the fifth fret on the G string, you would be playing an A minor 7 chord, the note we have changed to providing the necessary minor third.

This chord change, along with two minor seven chords produced with the use of the sixth harmonics, is the basis for the next example, a minor seven chord vamp based on the cycle of fourths where we can clearly state the harmony for each chord. Note that in the first bar, the note at the third fret in the tab is the seventh harmonic, located just on the nut side of the third fret, while the notes at the third fret in the tab in the second bar represent the sixth harmonic, located just on the bridge side of the third fret. Also note that the harmonics in the notation are the diamond note head tones, and are written an octave lower than they actually sound.

The next example, played with a shuffle feel, demonstrates how we can create chords using harmonics at different frets to create other intervals besides fourths, in this case a vamp moving between a D/E chord, a variant of E sus, and an E7 chord. In this example we are using three harmonics to create our harmony and producing a major third interval in the first chord as a necessary interval in the D major triad we are playing, and a tritone, or flattened fifth interval in the second chord, a necessary interval in a dominant seven chord. In this example, the third fret in the tab represents the sixth harmonic throughout, located just on the bridge side of the third fret.

Our final example demonstrates how the same harmonics can function in a different chord simply by moving the bass note, in this case the harmonics serving as the third and seventh in a minor seven chord, and then, by moving the bass note down a semitone, representing the same tones in the resultant major seven chord. Here, the third fret in the tab represents the sixth harmonic, just on the bridge side of the third fret.

I'm sure you'll find ways to take some of these ideas in the examples and incorporate them in your own bass-lines, and I hope you have fun experimenting and discovering other possibilities with harmonics that can enhance and augment your ideas.

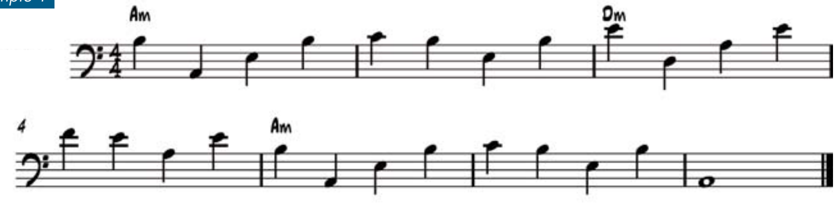
JANEK GWIZDALA

JANEK GWIZDALA ADVISES US HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF OUR PRACTICE TIME, WITH OR WITHOUT A TEACHER

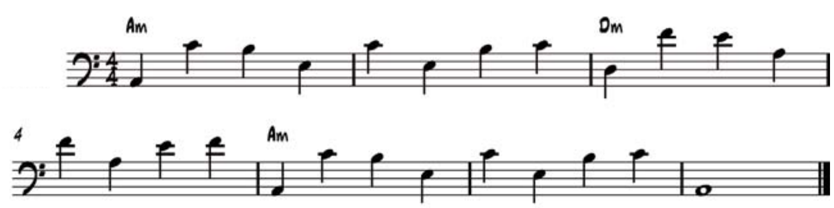
I want to give you a few ideas that I hope will serve as a catalyst for your own exploration when it comes to learning music. Most importantly, they will give you the ability to choose what you practise while challenging yourself at the same time. It's very easy to shy away from things that look difficult, take a long time, or aren't immediately intuitive for us, but by employing some of the techniques in this column, you'll be able to tailor your practice routine to the point where it's fun and productive at the same time. Any laziness you might have possessed can become a thing of the past, and you will never run out of things to practise.

Before we get to *example one*, there are a couple of points that are essential to getting the most out of these concepts:

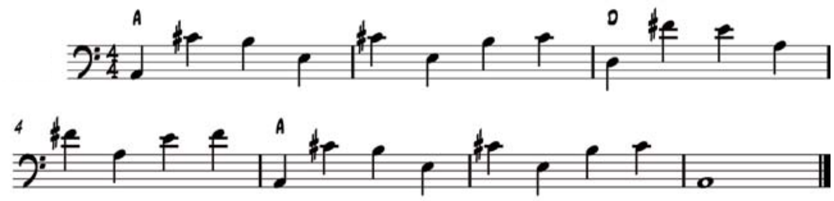
Example 1



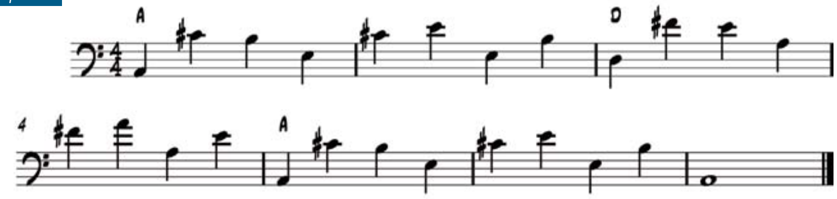
Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



- You must be honest with yourself. If you can't execute something correctly, be honest and spend longer on it before moving on.
- Be aware of yourself during time away from the instrument. Do not, under any circumstances, put yourself in a position to injure yourself. As soon as you're fatigued, or feeling stress anywhere in the body, take a break.
- Your imagination is your only limitation. I'm giving you some musical examples to go along with this column. These are examples I came up with and like for my routine. It doesn't mean they're going to be perfect for you, and you have to remember that. However, by simply changing a note or two here and there, you might open up a whole world of melody and harmony that connects with you on a personal level.

Example one falls under the fingers quite well both in terms of the shape you need to use with your left hand, and the fact that you can cross the strings fairly easily with your right hand when playing a free stroke as opposed to rest stroke. The challenge for me came when I wanted to change up the right-hand picking pattern. In *example two*, you're going to come across some immediate obstacles with the right hand, and that's hopefully going to expose some issues in your playing that need work. Don't forget to bear in mind how simple it is here to expose weakness in your technique. We didn't have to change any of the notes or the left hand shape from *example one* to *example two*, but by simply wanting to play those notes in a slightly different order, it reveals weaknesses in the right hand.

We're all going to find it harder to play different things. You may be reading this and thinking 'What the hell is Gwizdala talking about? I just blazed through these exercises like they were nothing'. But here's where the concept really kicks in, and where the honesty aspect of it all comes to the fore. If you did blaze through these two examples without hindrance, then it's time to dig deeper and find out where your weaknesses are. Perhaps the next step is to change a note in the left hand shape for instance, and make the exercise major instead of minor, as you can see in *example three*. Or perhaps you can increase the range that the fragment covers, as in *example four*, to push yourself to the point of failure. By the way, when I use the word 'failure' I can't even begin to convey how much of a positive word I think it is. It's when you're finding weakness in your playing that you're really learning something. When a mechanical aspect of your right hand isn't working, for instance, there's a small amount of failure there, but a huge amount of potential for learning – and not just learning, but learning how to fix whatever it is that's not working. This is how all great musicians, athletes, businessmen, artists, entrepreneurs and so on learn, overcome, and succeed.

As always, check out all my free videos, blogs, music, and general rants and raves online at www.janekgwizdala.com.

JANEK GWIZDALA

JANEK GWIZDALA SUPPLIES TIPS ON HOW TO SOLO WHILE KEEPING AN EYE ON HARMONY

Something I get asked a lot about is how to play melodic solos that create and resolve tension. How do you get outside the chord changes you're playing over, and then resolve that tension back inside the harmony so you don't alienate your audience with every song?

In this month's column I have one exercise and then a way to integrate that exercise into a solo, and with just a little bit of work (literally by practising this five minutes a day) you will have another great tool in your muscle memory for creating and releasing tension.

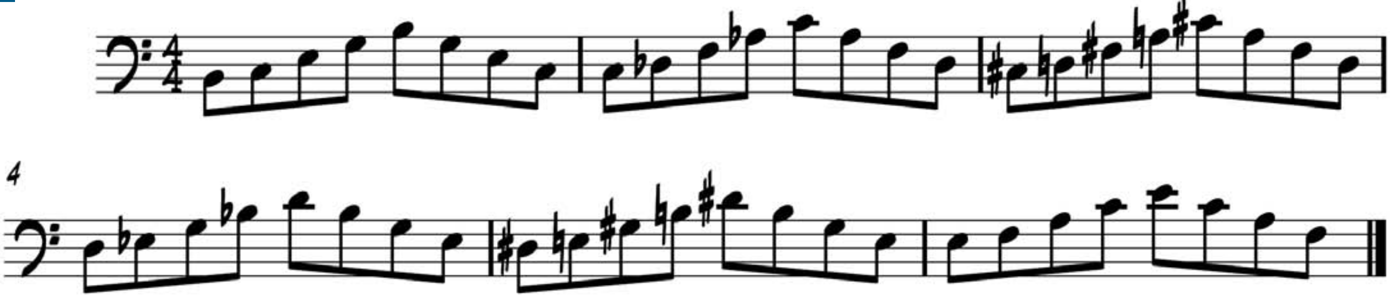
Here's the good news – the basic idea is simple! It's a major 7 arpeggio, and I have complete faith that everyone reading this, whether they know the official name for the group of notes or not, is capable of playing it. By working on this basic shape all over your instrument, as I've set out in example one, you'll get some fluidity with the shape, and be entering information into your muscle memory that will never leave.

I favour the 1, 2, 1, 4, 3, fingering on the left hand. It seems to be the one that's easiest to start working on this shape with. There are, of course, many different ways to finger this shape with the left hand, but this 1, 2, 1, 4, 3, fingering should be a great way in if you haven't worked on this shape before. As boring as it sounds, you really need to work on this stuff slowly. There is no substitute for working from a low tempo to a high tempo when integrating new information into your vocabulary, and the long-term payoff is huge. I've been going back to basics recently with everything I know, and just working on all the details at a slow tempo. It's taken my playing out of a slump lately and I feel way more in control when I step out on stage and play.

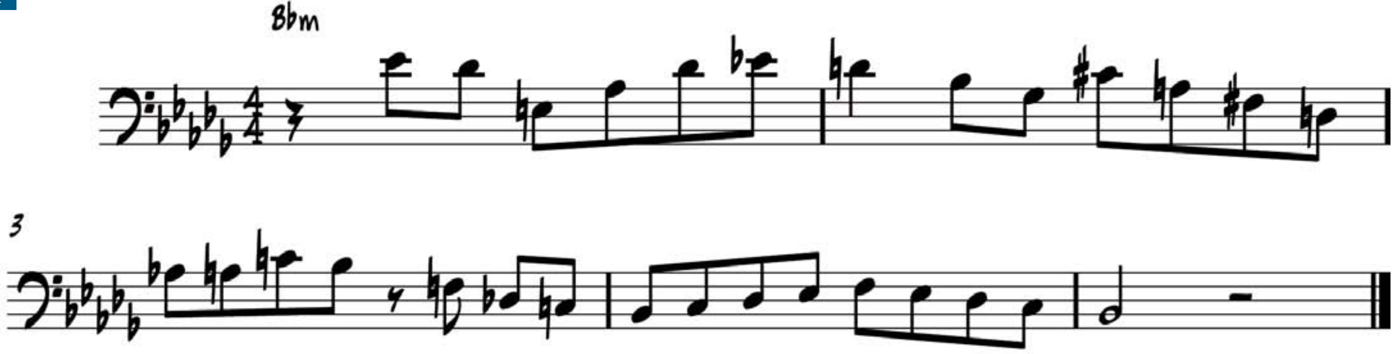
Now, to get to integrating this major 7 arpeggio into a melodic idea… I took the line in example two from a Joey Calderazzo solo on 'El Niño' from the Michael Brecker album *Two Blocks From The Edge*. The original is in F, but I was filming a lesson this week and was jamming in Bb, so that's where we're working on this phrase today. The most striking thing to me about this line is how subtle the 'outside' aspect of the melody. It's not a long, complicated, angular piece of tension in the line, it's actually super freakin' simple. Taking our shape from *example one*, we simply move this shape down chromatically through this idea to create the tension, and then release into the Bb minor language. The opening cell of the overall phrase uses mainly notes from Bb minor pentatonic, which is all inside, and with that one E natural you start to create the tension. Then we drop into two of the major 7 arpeggio shapes in Eb and chromatically down to D, before releasing the tension back inside to Bb minor.

There are so many ways you can finish this phrase, and as a way to increase the material you're working on in your practice routine, I would encourage you to compose different endings to this phrase. Giving yourself a tool like this to create tension, and then composing different endings and releases to the inside, will increase your overall vocabulary and palette of sounds in a big way.

Example 1



Example 2



Create with a passion
Black Label basses.
BLACK
Esprit I Bass
Thru Red.
Perception Bass
Vintage White.
Fret-King Black Label Basses
Flying in the face of convention is normal for Fret-King. The overall vibe of the Esprit I bass is unconventional, and a statement of individuality, but it's also a true bass player's tool, with a level of comfort which bass players really need, a playing feel to die for, and an astonishing range of sounds.
The Perception captures the solid, precise tonality that underpins so much music, and demonstrates just how versatile a passive bass can be.
Available in four and five string versions, this is a 'go-to' bass that players the world over will really appreciate.
Esprit I Bass specification: Body: 2pc agathis. Neck: maple bolt-on satin finish. Fingerboard: rosewood, 10" radius, 22 medium jumbo frets, pearl dots. Scale: 34"/864mm. Nut: graphite. Tuners: Wilkinson WJBL200. Bridge: Wilkinson WBBC. Pickups: 1 x Fret-King Platinum Series WJM. Controls: volume, tone, Vari-coil. Hardware: Chrome. Luxury Fret-King carry bag included. Perception specification: Body: two-piece centre-jointed American alder body. Neck: Canadian hard rock maple. Fingerboard: rosewood, 10" radius, 22 medium jumbo frets, pearl dots. Scale: 34"/863mm. Nut: graphite. Pickups: Fret-King WJBR and WPB. Controls: two volume, master tone. Hardware: Wilkinson WBBC bridge and WJBL 750 mini tuners. Luxury Fret-King carry bag included.
Fret-King by Trev Wilkinson .com
WORLDWIDE TRADE DISTRIBUTORS
www.jhs.co.uk
© 2014 JHS & Co. Ltd.

Manchester Bass Lounge
Lowering the tone...
We are the North of England's specialist bass guitar retailer and consultant offering an extensive selection of new and preowned basses plus amplification, strings and accessories... all with unrivalled service and customer focus.
ALPHER INSTRUMENTS
Overwater
Gordon-Smith
Everson Guitars
Enfield Guitars
sandberg
G&L
Tel: 07837 011 889 / 0161 799 9002 Email: drew@manchesterbasslounge.com Web: www.manchesterbasslounge.com

DAVE MARKS

DAVE MARKS IS HERE TO MAKE YOU A FASTER AND MORE IMPRESSIVE BASS PLAYER, STARTING WITH A LOOK AT TREMOLO RAKING (NOTHING TO DO WITH GARDENING)

Let's banish any thoughts of skipping practice with some heavy-duty bass licks! I'm going to dedicate this entire column to the idea of tremolo raking – a technique that I first heard in the ridiculous bass soloing of Mr Billy Sheehan, he of Mr Big fame.

Basically, we're going to use raking on the bass to simulate the sound of the tremolo technique that many classical and flamenco guitarists frequently use. We're trying to create a flurry of notes using rakes with either two, three or four fingers on the plucking hand.

At its simplest, this raking tremolo could be played using two plucking fingers across the D and G strings, following the pattern shown in *figure one*. Pluck the D string with finger one and then use finger two to rake across the G and D strings. You can accent the G string note slightly: this will help to create the sound of the top note jumping out and the lower note bubbling away underneath.

This gives us a nice three-note pattern, but what if we'd like to expand that slightly, to create a group of four notes? The easiest way that I've found is to add the third finger on the plucking hand: see *figure two*.

Figure 1

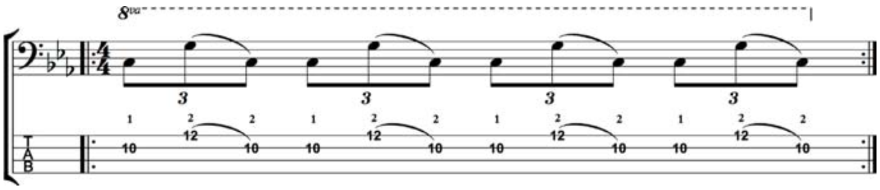


Figure 2

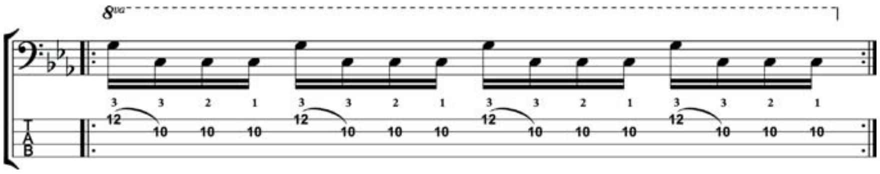
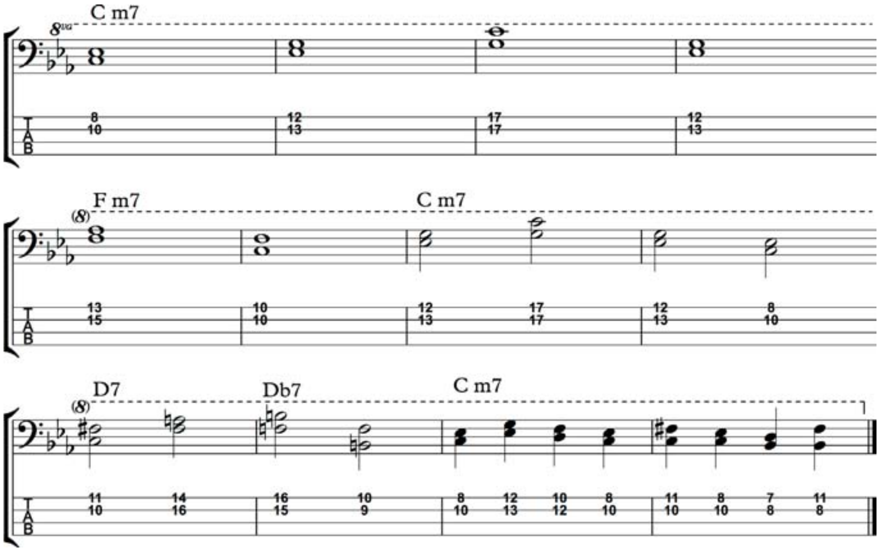


Figure 3



For many of you, the third finger may be completely underused, bearing a striking resemblance to an enfeebled infant when you try to bring it into play. Perseverance is the key here – you should gently try to involve it in this sort of lick and at all times strive to stay relaxed and fluid with your movements.

Because we're trying to create a rolling rumble of notes, you need to be quite gentle with the approach – if you have tension in your hands, they'll get very tired, very quickly doing this type of playing.

Let's take these two ideas and apply them over a chord progression. I've laid out some simple double-stop chord voicings that you can use, mostly opting for roots, 3rds and 5ths to create a strong, clear approach to the harmony.

Where a chord is held for four bars, you could sit on one voicing, but I've opted to move through each bar to create a little motion and interest to the part. This kind of playing has nothing to do with traditional, groove-based support playing. As a result, you can experiment with time and dynamics. Don't lock the tempo strictly – try and add a little ebb and flow, using speed and volume to stop the part from sounding flat and lifeless.

This sort of playing can sound great for a slightly ambient intro to a tune. Try it while accompanying a melody instrument. Rather than approaching it from a groove perspective, think of creating an atmosphere: with the way global warming's going, we might be needing a new one.

Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.
Elixir® strings
GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

DAVID ETHERIDGE

DAVID ETHERIDGE GOES BOLDLY INTO THE WORLD OF HARMONICS WIELDING ONLY HIS BOW

It's always nice to show things on the bass that the average punter would deem impossible. One of the things I like trying on my fretless six-string is full, six-part harmonic chording – with a smattering of chorus for that sublime impact, of course. The reaction on punters' faces can be priceless. If you've explored harmonics on bass guitar (obviously for tuning) then you'll be familiar with the fret techniques: seventh fret D harmonic on the G string = fifth fret double octave harmonic on the D string. The same can apply to the double bass, although there are no frets on the bass to help you – unless some misguided teacher has put coloured dots and/or white tape on the fingerboard to 'help' the student. Argh! You need to rely on muscle memory and position knowledge to help you.

If we go up to the stratospheric end of the fingerboard we'll find a completely new world of harmonics.

Now this is going to depend on how long your fingerboard actually is, and needless to say, all fingerboards are not necessarily equal. Some might stop around the double octave mark (G on the G string), while others may go up a further third (B) or even a fifth (D). If you're one of the lucky ones this means you can finger notes all the way up to D two octaves and a fifth above your open G. However,

> "ALL HARMONICS WORK ON THE BASIS OF FRACTIONS. DIVIDE A STRING AT THE OCTAVE AND YOU'VE SPLIT IT INTO TWO EQUAL SECTIONS"

Here are the tuning harmonics for the G and D strings: 1st finger on D gives the double octave, while the 4th finger on the top string gives the same pitch an octave and a 5th above the open G

To get the harmonics sounding clearly, bow towards the end of the fingerboard, similar to playing on the back pickup of your bass guitar

Here's the thumb at the double octave harmonic on the G string. The other fingers are in place to play B, D and F as required

The second finger provides a high D harmonic. Note that you need to keep the other fingers clear of the string so as not to mute the harmonic or ruin the node point (where the harmonic lies on the string

harmonics offer a range of extra notes and effects – and I'll point out that usable results will mean using the bow.

So what notes are available? All harmonics work on the basis of fractions. Divide a string at the octave and you've split it into two equal sections. Divide into three and you'll get the D harmonic on the G string in two different places. Divide into four at the double octave and things get more interesting the higher you go. From the double octave G on the G string, the natural harmonics provide a G9 arpeggio: G, B, D, F and A. Try playing these and see what results you get. Some trial and error will be needed until you get used to the fact that the notes are very close together compared to what you may have been used to. For best results, bow fairly closely to the bridge to get the upper harmonics of the sound to stand out and not sound muffled. You'll notice an interesting thing: the B and F natural will seem slightly out of tune, as they're derived from natural overtones rather than the equal temperament we've been used to since the time of Bach and the first pianos. There are further harmonics above the ones I've described (in theory, they can go on forever) but the smaller the fractions you divide the string into, the less distinct and controllable they become. Each string has its own series of harmonics, and, once you've practised this, it's worth exploring your bass to find them.

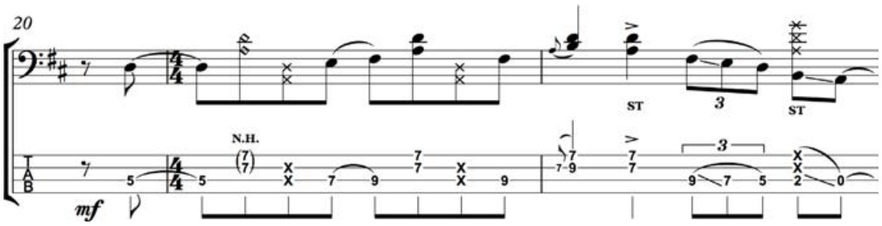
DAVE MARKS

DAVE'S HERE TO MAKE YOUR BASS PLAYING MORE SHREDDY THAN AN INDUSTRIAL-SIZED SHREDDER WITH A HELLISHLY COOL GROOVE SOLO

Let's begin to work through a new solo bass piece. We're going to dive right in to the meat of this solo, so it's worth mentioning that there would be a tremolo plucked chordal intro before you jump in.

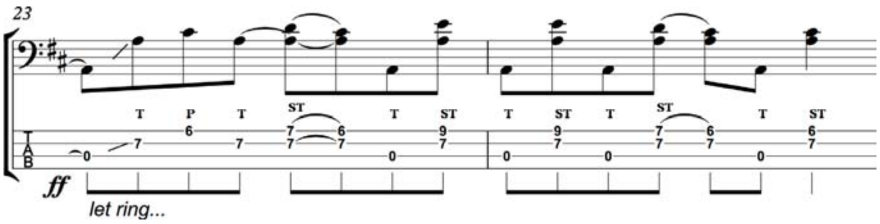
Because of that we'll stay with a thumb-and-fingers approach as we head into something a little more groove-based.

Line 1



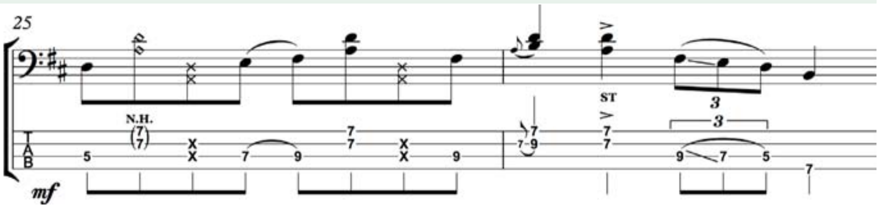
In line one, we hit a D note, followed by some natural harmonics across the seventh fret, and then throw your plucking hand down against the strings for a little simulated backbeat. Thumb-pluck the seventh fret, hammer-on to the ninth and this time play the fretted notes on the seventh fret. Again, whack that backbeat down and thumb-pluck the ninthbfret. Whew. That's bar one. In bar two, double pluck with fingers one and two and hammer on to the ninth fret, then hit a nice hard strum, slide and pull off on the A string. To finish, whack a strum across three strings and allow your second fret note to pull-off to the open A string.

Line 2



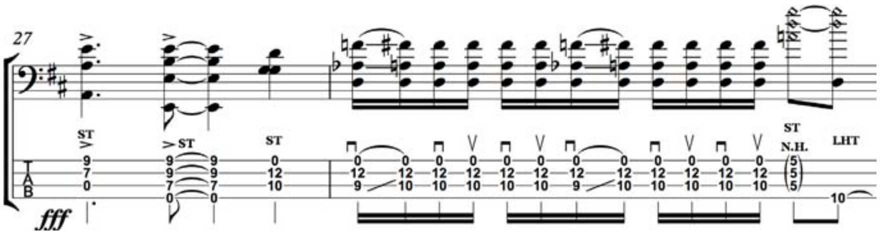
Line two features a nice combination of slaps and strums. You want to get a nice ringing sound from all notes here: take care between fingernail strums on chords and slaps on open strings to create a sonorous, sustained sound. It needs to be quite aggressive and played with a certain amount of beans, if you please.

Line 3



Line three is almost exactly the same as line one, apart from the last note – here, we stay in the middle of the neck to lead perfectly into…

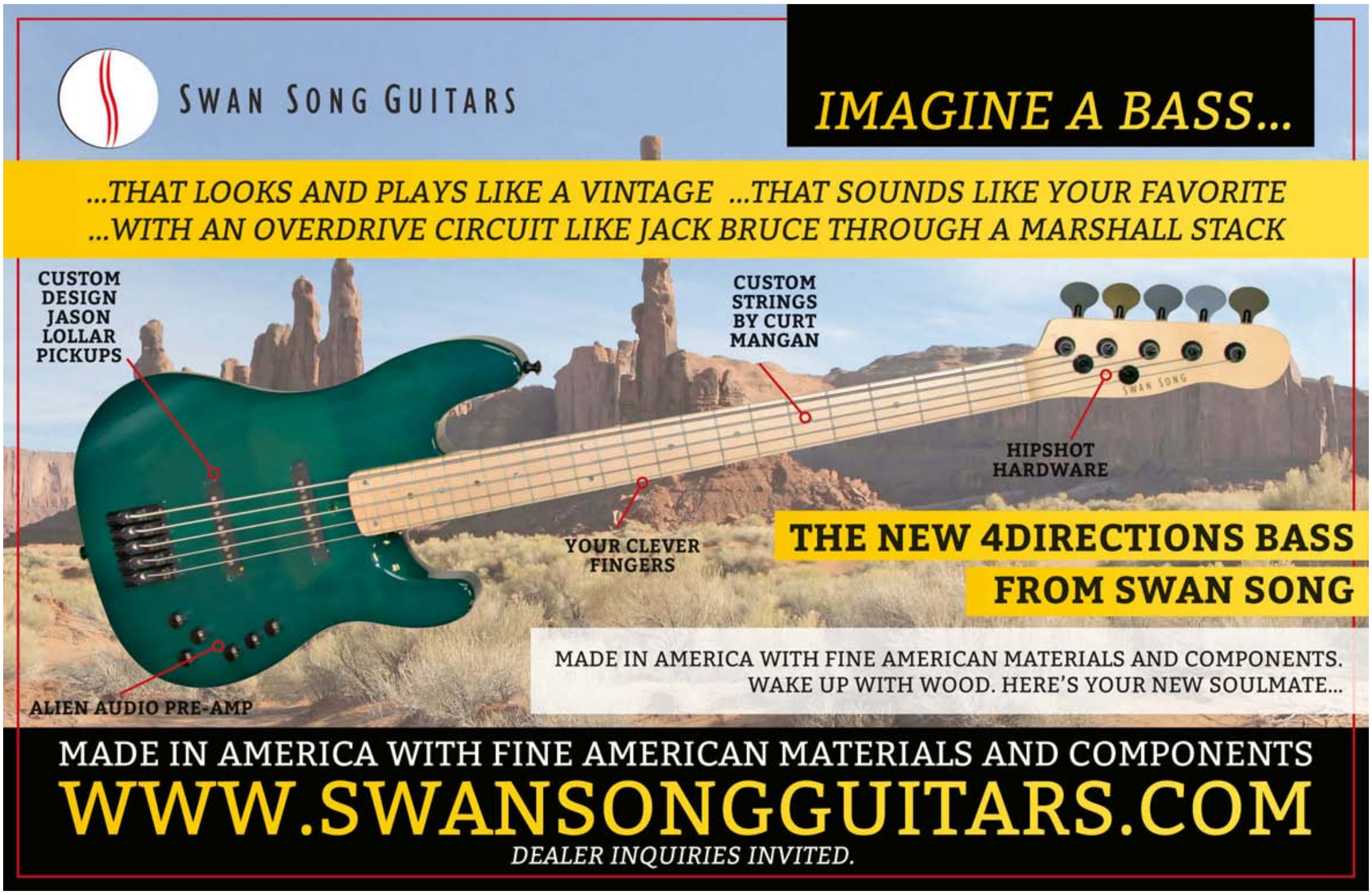
Line 3



…Chord strums! Hit 'em hard with your fingernails and let them ring out. In the second bar, you need to co-ordinate between slides (ninth to 10th fret) and sixteenth-note strumming. Keep the time tight and grooving, but allow the chord itself to ring out, especially that open string. Finish up with natural harmonics across the fifth fret and a left hand tap (a hammer-on from nowhere, if you will) onto the 10th fret of the E string.

As with all pieces, start this off slowly and try to connect the techniques. There's quite a lot of stuff going on and I've blended lots of percussive approaches, so take your time and don't get frustrated if it feels a little sticky. Clarity, note quality, groove and dynamics are all things to stay aware of here, as they help to bring musicality to what is otherwise just a set of notes. Work hard and next month, I'll see you for part three.

Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.
Elixir® strings
GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited


SWAN SONG GUITARS
IMAGINE A BASS...
...THAT LOOKS AND PLAYS LIKE A VINTAGE ...THAT SOUNDS LIKE YOUR FAVORITE
...WITH AN OVERDRIVE CIRCUIT LIKE JACK BRUCE THROUGH A MARSHALL STACK
CUSTOM DESIGN JASON LOLLAR PICKUPS
CUSTOM STRINGS BY CURT MANGAN
HIPSHOT HARDWARE
YOUR CLEVER FINGERS
ALIEN AUDIO PRE-AMP
THE NEW 4DIRECTIONS BASS
FROM SWAN SONG
MADE IN AMERICA WITH FINE AMERICAN MATERIALS AND COMPONENTS.
WAKE UP WITH WOOD. HERE'S YOUR NEW SOULMATE...
MADE IN AMERICA WITH FINE AMERICAN MATERIALS AND COMPONENTS
WWW.SWANSONGGUITARS.COM
DEALER INQUIRIES INVITED.

Hand-made in U.S.A.
Since 1975
Pedulla
You never played better.®
Pedulla.com

DAVE MARKS

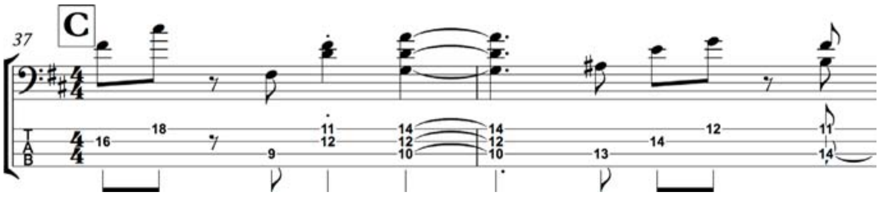
WUNDERKIND MARKS HAS THE FASTEST FINGERS IN THE WEST. READ AND LEARN!

Aare you feeling listless, bored or otherwise unsure what to do with yourself? Might I recommend spending more time with your bass in a room with no windows, giving it hardcore every hour that you're awake?

To get you on your way, we're starting up high on the neck with some three-note chords. I've tried to use some nice voicings, either with a nice wide spread, like our opening root-fifth-ninth chord or some tighter voicings with seconds in them.

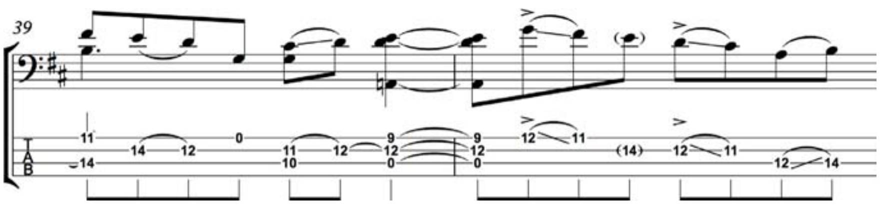
Line 1

Polyphonic instruments sound rich and detailed because of the way that notes resonate when sustained into each other. The sustain pedal on a piano gives them a great 'cheat', so we need to try and emulate that cheat. The key to our first line is letting the chords and arpeggios ring for their full length and making sure the notes are all clear – if you're not used to playing spread chords, it may be time to man up and consider some of the choices you've made in your life.



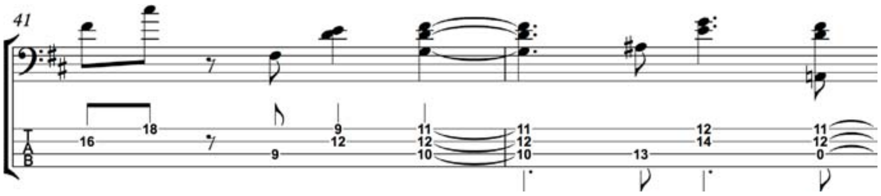
Line 2

That was the easy part. Now we're going to get into some slightly finger-twisting technique. We're mixing open strings and fretted notes to emulate the natural resonance of a chordal instrument, so the important part is keeping your fingers arched, allowing open strings to ring out and holding down all the fretted notes for their full length. Also, watch out for the accents in bar 40 and make sure to get those slides in.



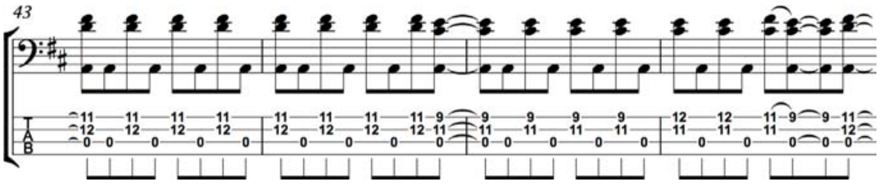
Line 2

You'll notice that line three is similar to line one, but I've changed a few voicings – this is a nice way of reusing material, but creating a slightly different sound and feel. Let 'em ring out and add a subtle vibrato to really get those chords singing.



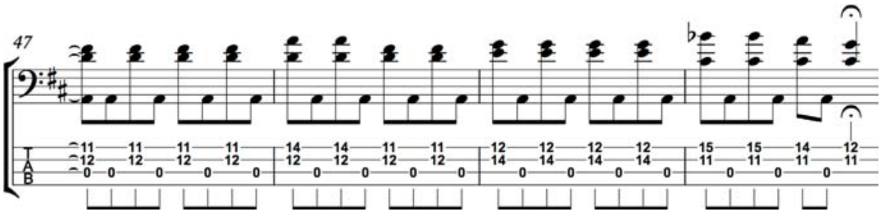
Line 3

We finish up with a nice classical-sounding pedal tone idea. Everything here is played over an open A string, allowing us to create tension and resolution as we move around the harmonic centre of an A7 chord.



Line 3

This sort of section can sound super-dry if you play it in a flat, emotionless way, so try and draw some expression out using dynamics, timing and a little occasional vib on the two-note chords. Technique-wise, it's thumb for the open A string, fingers one and two for the chords.



Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.

Elixir® strings

GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

Warwick LWA 1000
winner of
MIPA AWARD 2014
LWA 1000
WCA 408 LW CE
WCA 112 LW CE
The first Carbon-Neutral Company in the Music Industry
Family Owned - Solar Powered - Sustainably Manufactured in a Green Environment
www.warwick.de
info@warwick.de
www.warwick-distribution.de
www.facebook.de/warwickmusicdistribution
ClimatePartner
climate neutral
Basses, Amps&Rock'n Roll.
FSC
DIN 14007
DIN 18001
EMAS
ISO 50001

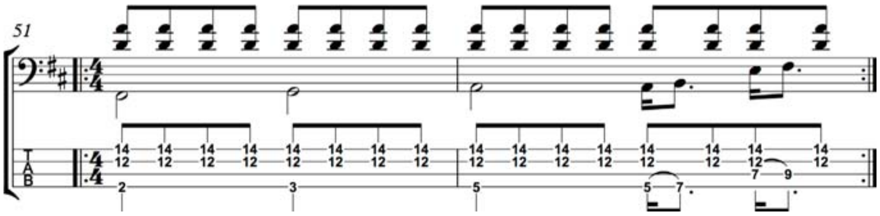
DAVE MARKS

DAVE MARKS CONTINUES HIS QUEST TO MAKE YOU A BETTER BASS PLAYER; WILL YOU BE UP TO THE CHALLENGE OR WILL YOU TAP OUT?

So far, we've looked at some thumb and finger plucking, tremolo raking, strumming and slapping. To round things off, let's get our tap on! I've decided to keep the tapping in this piece quite simple and to create easily distinguishable chord and bass note parts. The key to it is to create clear, sonorous double stops in the high register and ensure that your bass notes are ringing out loud and clear.

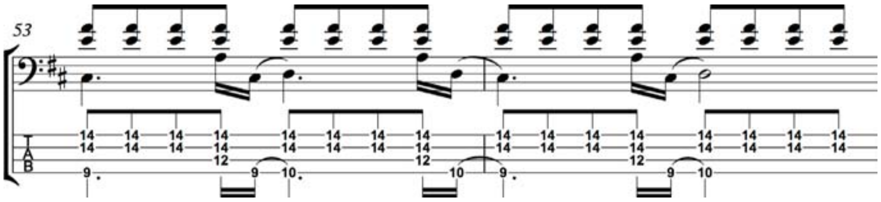
Line 1

Our first line involves tapping a D5 shape up top and moving a variety of bass notes under it. Tap with fingers one and three and set your thumb on the top of the bass neck to anchor you in place. This static shape should keep it nice and simple for tap-amateurs – once you get the rhythm nice and steady in your plucking hand, focus on the bass movement.



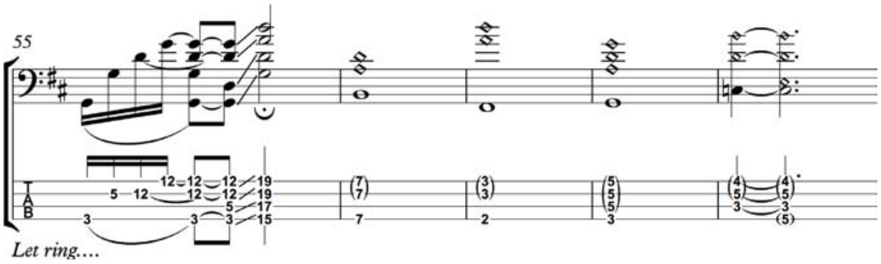
Line 2

We start with a low F#, creating a D 1st inversion (aka D/F#). As we change bass note, our chord tap stays the same, creating a G add9 chord. Move up to A and we have D 2nd inversion (D/A) and finally do a little tapped hammer to create B m7 and hammer again to get an F# before repeating the whole thing again, with gusto.



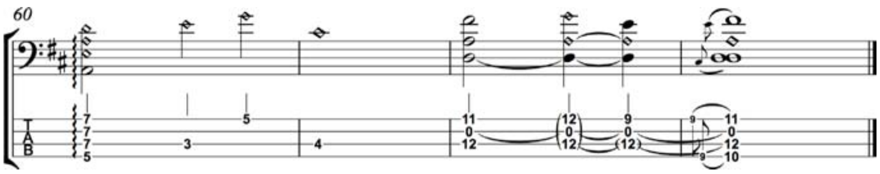
Line 3

Now, we straighten up the tapped shape – a simple barre shape across the 14th fret and again an easy, consistent eighth-note rhythm. It's a little trickier here with some syncopations, but seriously, if you're not going to step up to this minor challenge, you're basically agreeing to being afraid of everything for the rest of your life.



Line 4

As we head into the final section of our piece, the tapping gives way to some harmonic chord voicings. To make the transition, we perform a (slightly) tricky tapped sliding chord. Start with your fretting hand, hammering a low G on the E string, (fret three) and a high G on the D string, (fret five) then use the plucking hand to tap across the D and G strings (fret 12). The tricky part comes from smoothly sliding these notes up to create a chord where the position of both hands is much closer.



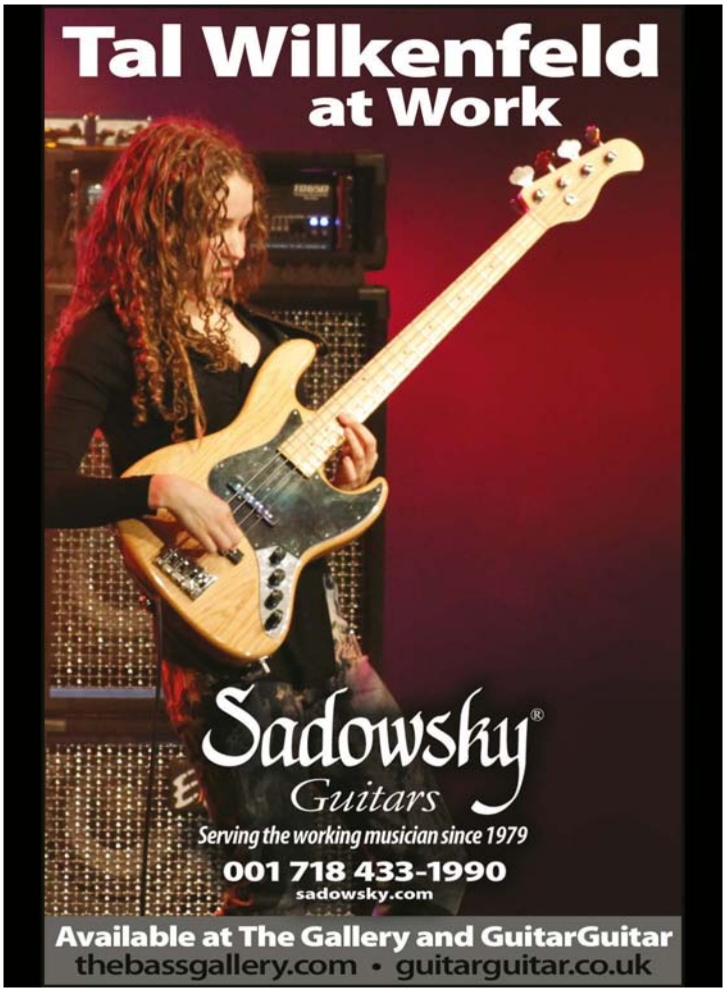
Your fretting hand has to slide up 12 frets, while your plucking hand slides up seven, and this has to happen smoothly. It may take a little practice to get it feeling natural. From there, we use our thumb for the bass note and fingers for the harmonics in each chord voicing. In the last bar, I'll allow you to pluck the harmonic on the E string with your thumb. You can have that one for free.

We're almost done! Fret with your first finger and barre the harmonics with your fourth, then do a nice arpeggiated drag across your plucking hand going T-1-2-3. Swap your fretting finger to finger three and keep your hand arched so that all of the harmonics ring out. To wrap, pluck a three note chord, then keep the D string ringing and play two 12th fret harmonics, then the 9th fret on the G string and finally let the middle two strings ring and pluck (thumb and first finger) notes on the 9th fret, sliding them up to complete our final D major chord. All done!

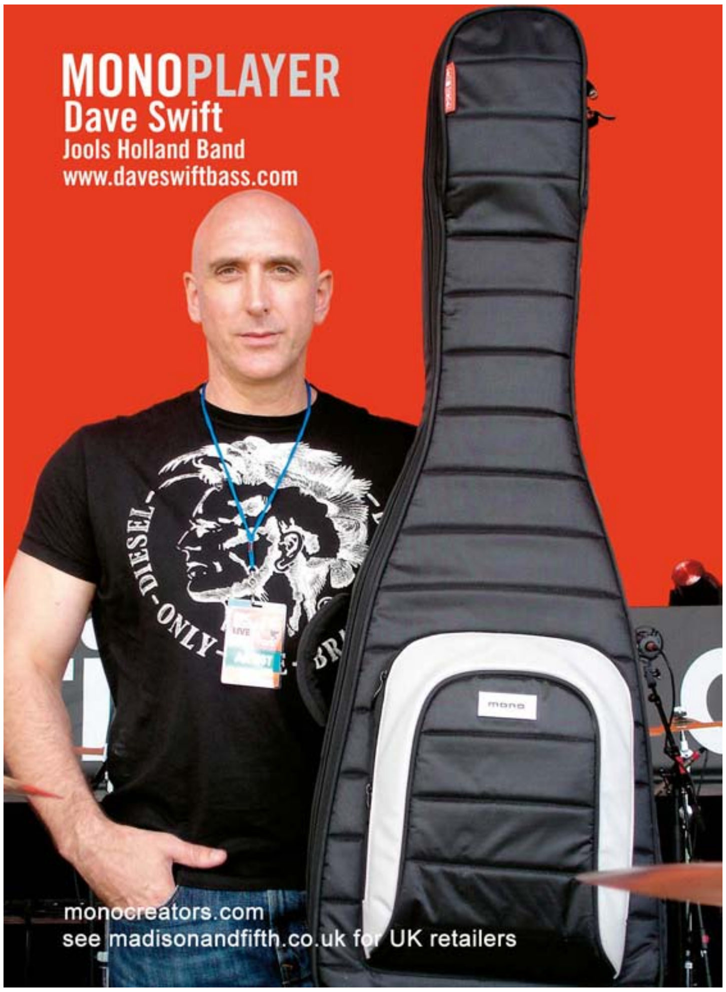
Now put all of the parts together and begin working them up into a cohesive sounding performance. Take it slowly and work on getting the sections to flow into each other. Use timing and dynamics to really bring the piece to life and above all, enjoy it!

Elixir® Strings for Bass:
An All New Playing Experience.
Elixir® strings
GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

Skjold Design Guitars.
Art Transcended.
Precise execution requires precise feel. Refined over decades, a Skjold bass leaves nothing to chance. Exacting feel combined with purposeful design. Never a fret out of place, or a design choice made randomly. Every curve, cutaway, and placement has a history and reason for existing. Each bass exemplifies the ideal that even the feel of a bass can become an art form. Experience a Skjold bass and see why some of the best players in the world rely on Skjold Design Guitars for their art.
www.skjolddesign.com
Available exclusively at www.bassdirect.co.uk



Tal Wilkenfeld at Work
Sadowsky® Guitars
Serving the working musician since 1979
001 718 433-1990
sadowsky.com
Available at The Gallery and GuitarGuitar
thebassgallery.com • guitarguitar.co.uk



MONOPLAYER
Dave Swift
Jools Holland Band
www.daveswiftbass.com
monocreators.com
see madisonandfifth.co.uk for UK retailers

KEV SANDERS

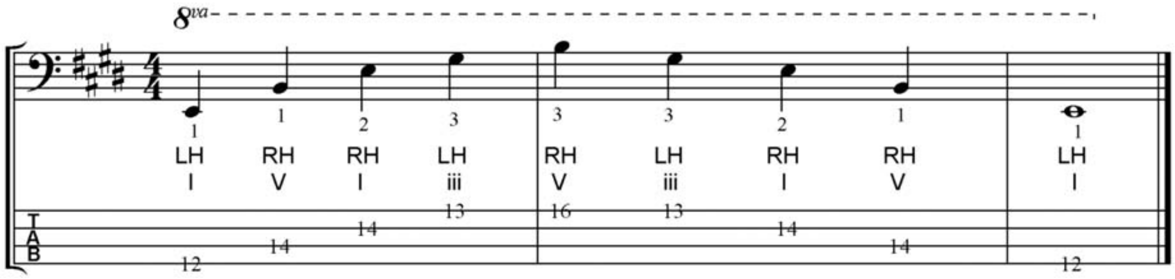
TONE KING KEV CELEBRATES THE SPLENDID CAREER OF STUART HAMM, WHO HAS BROUGHT HOME THE BASS BACON WITH MANY A STADIUM BAND...

In the 80s and 90s, guitarists such as Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, Eric Johnson and Frank Gambale, who needed a rhythm section that could handle their fret-melting compositions and arrangements, often had Stuart Hamm on speed-dial. He was then, and is now, the shredder's bassist of choice, and with good reason. One of the few bassists with the technical ability and musicianship to match those guitarists note for note, Hamm is also a stunning soloist in his own right and has written, performed and recorded some of the most technically demanding pieces in the history of the instrument.

Like most people, I knew little of Hamm before the release of guitarist Steve Vai's 1984 album *Flex-Able*.

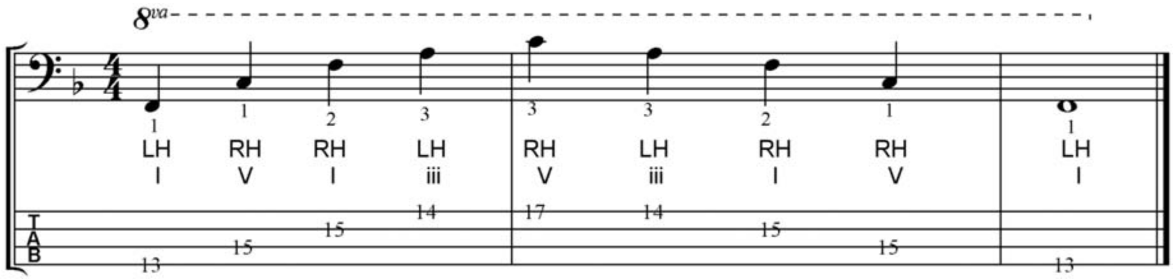
EXERCISE 1

Start by practising this major triad from E (E string, 12th fret).



EXERCISE 2

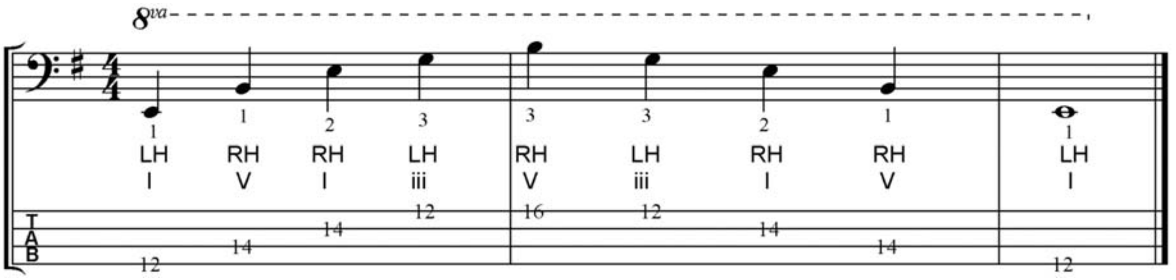
Now move everything up a semitone, so that your first note is an F, tapped with the first finger of the left hand.



Continue in this way, up or down the fretboard, until you have played all 12 keys.

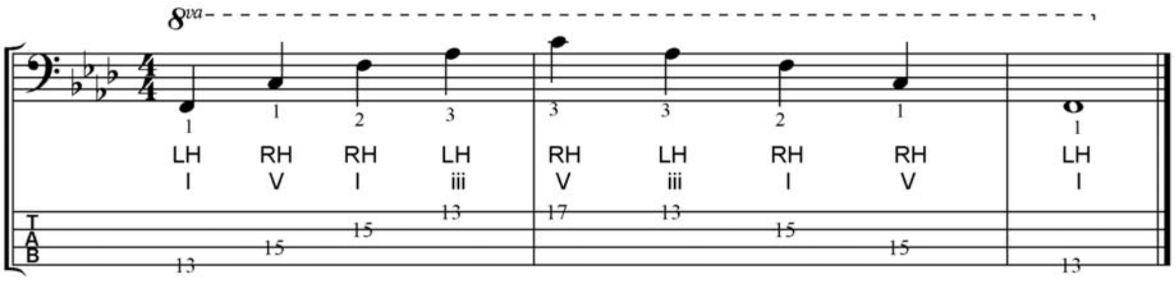
EXERCISE 3

These minor triads have just one note different from the major triads above. Start this minor triad from E (E string, 12th fret).



EXERCISE 4

Now move everything up a semitone, so that your first note is an F, tapped with the first finger of the left hand.

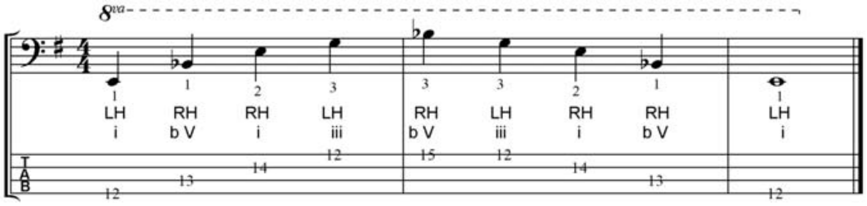


Extending your tone life

EXERCISE 5

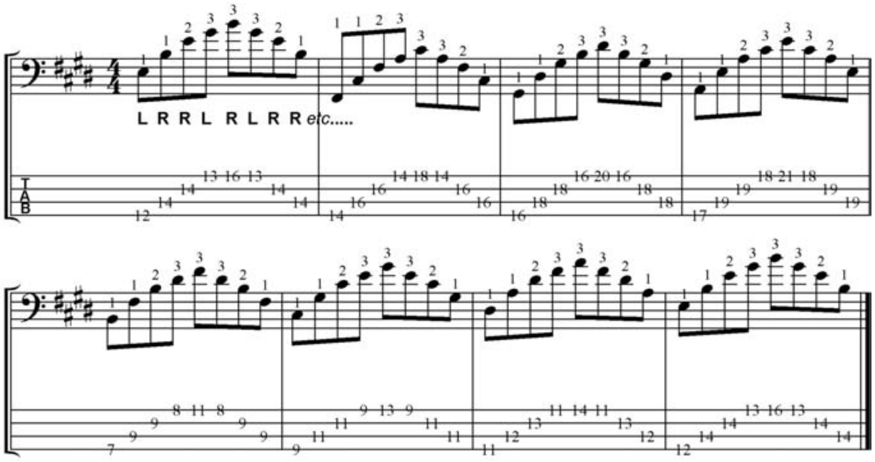
Now that you have the basic major and minor triads, let's learn one more: diminished, which will then enable us to harmonise an entire major key.

After practising these exercises, you'll be able to outline the chords from any major diatonic sequence.



EXERCISE 6

Play through this diatonic series in E major, then try three other keys:



He was born in 1960 in New Orleans as the son of a musicologist father and an opera singer mother, and started playing bass in 1973, cutting his teeth by playing double bass in the school big band. Five years later he was at Berklee, where he met Steve Vai. After Vai left Frank Zappa's band to record his debut album, he called up Hamm who had moved to Boston following a stint working with an Elvis impersonator. Humble beginnings, eh?

After the success of *Flex-Able*, Hamm decided to record his own solo album *Radio Free Albemuth* and, as a return favour for recording some tracks on Joe Satriani's *Surfing With The Alien*, Satriani contributed guitar parts. Hamm went on to tour extensively with Satriani bringing his amazing solo chops to a much wider audience, who were enthralled by his virtuosity. Judging by the rapturous response he got for his solos at these Satch gigs, many must have thought they'd inadvertently turned up to a Stuart Hamm show, rather than a Joe Satriani one.

STYLE

Hamm is a master of many different styles and techniques, but if there's one at which he really excels, it's tapping chords and arpeggios within his solos. We could learn some of his solo passages played in this way, but let's instead try to get a handle on the technique in a wider sense. This way, once you've learned the basics you can work on your own Hamm-style compositions.

GEAR

Back in the 1980s, Hamm was using Philip Kubicki's Factor bass, a headless design with a built-in drop D extension. Unlike the more radically designed (and popular) Steinberger of the day, the Kubicki had a body made of poplar and a neck of multi-laminated maple. Later, Fender produced their first artist-specific bass: the Stuart Hamm Urge. This had a sleek alder body, two-octave rosewood fingerboard and three-band active EQ. The pickups were a J/P/J configuration. Fender later introduced the Urge II which featured a Hipshot D-tuner. Although they were popular, these basses were discontinued in 2010, after which Washburn released their own Hamm signature model. He was an early and enthusiastic endorser of Hartke amplification and speakers and, along with his favourite GHS strings.

ESSENTIAL TRACKS

'Moonlight Sonata', *Radio Free Albemuth*, Stuart Hamm
An impressive tapped version of Beethoven's masterpiece. As if transcribing the whole thing and adapting it for four-string bass wasn't enough, he also plays in in the correct key: C sharp minor!

'Country Music (A Night In Hell)', *Radio Free Albemuth*, Stuart Hamm
A live show favourite and often segued with 'Moonlight Sonata'. This is Hamm's wry version of a bluegrass/hoedown tune using slapping and tapping techniques, amazing and hilarious at the same time.

'Blue Powder', *Passion And Warfare*, Steve Vai
Great supporting bass playing from Hamm (when he could get a note in edgeways, that is).

'Charlotte's Song', *Outbound*, Stuart Hamm
Something of a departure from the previous albums. Hamm displays a much more atmospheric, chord-based approach and this solo bass composition is, for me, the standout track of the album.

like no other string.

Elixir® strings

GORE, ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and other designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2013 W. L. Gore & Associates, (UK) Limited

DAVE MARKS

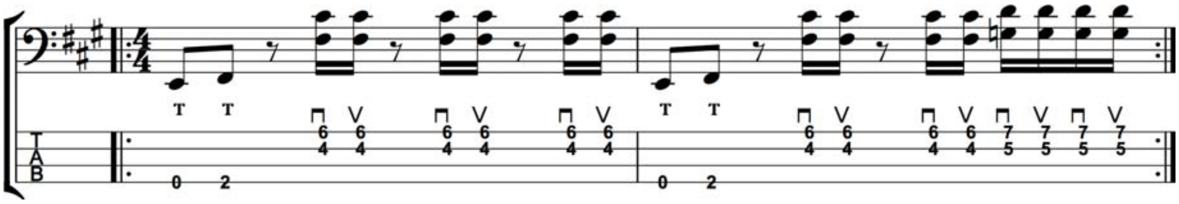
IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE? NO, IT'S SUPERBASSIST MARKS, HERE TO ADD SOME ZING TO YOUR SHREDDING...

A the barrage of techniques that has been the previous columns, I'm going to pull things back a little. I want to discuss technique – to drop a little science and give you something to consider while you spend all of those hours shedding away.

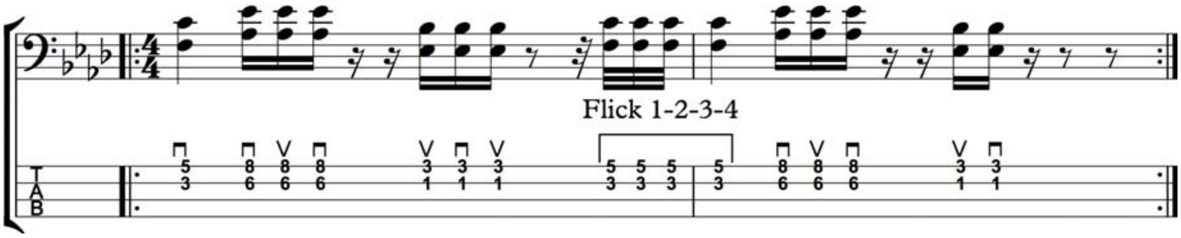
It's easy to get carried away in the how of technique. Building speed, strength, stamina and fluidity are all important. However, it's important to pause every so often and look at the reasons why we practise, and why we seek to improve our technique.

If I have an idea, it's my ability to physically articulate that idea that turns it from a thought to music. The better your technique, the less process there is between the thought and the sound – and that can only be a good thing.

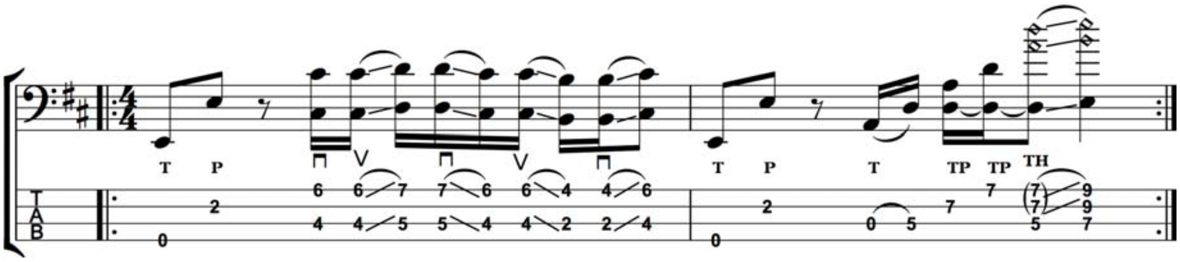
Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



I remember when I was studying at college and indeed in the first few years after I left, I felt an enormous pressure to have a giant 'trick-bag' – an arsenal of flashy techniques that allowed me to play solo bass shows, deliver masterclasses and shred in bands. In recent years, I've failed to maintain some of those techniques, and although that may sound like a negative, it's actually been a very positive evolution. The main reason I've allowed my priorities to change is because my ideas are changing. If technique is simply the facilitator of an idea, then it shouldn't dictate the ideas… although a lot of people fall into that trap.

In your search to build a peronalised set of techniques, it's important to explore lots of different options, to discover those that create a sound which resonates with you. With that in mind, here's a few nice licks to explore using some slightly quirky techniques.

Figure one is all about slap and strum. Follow the guide closely for up and downstrokes so that your rhythmic feel stays consistent. Experiment with just fingers for both up and down (Stanley Clarke style) and fingernails on the downstroke, thumbnail on the upstroke for a more even percussive attack.

Figure two supercharges our strumming with a little flick of the fingers. At the end of bar one, ball up the fingers in your plucking hand and cover then with your thumb. Let 'em flick out 1-2-3-4 for a rapid-fire blast of notes with a flamenco vibe.

Finally, *figure three*: let's mix strums, slides and some tapping. Bar one isn't technically too difficult, but you really have to co-ordinate, so that each strum is immediately followed by a slide, creating a continuous flow of sixteenth notes. It sounds sweet when it's fast, but makes sure it's grooving at a slow tempo before you crank it up.

In bar two, we slap, we pop and then slap the open A string and hammer on with fingers one, then fingers three and four across the D and G strings on the seventh fret, giving you D-A-D.

Finally, TH stands for 'tapped harmonics' – so tap with your fretting hand (fingers one and two) 12 frets above (fret 19) and then slide your whole fretting hand up two frets. Now repeat until it sounds wicked.

Ad Index

COMPANY	PG NO
FENDER	2, 39
HEADSTOCK	19
STATUS GRAPHITE	35
BARNES & MULLINS	43
WARWICK	53, 155
POLAR AUDIO	56, 67
BASS DIRECT	63
GIBSON	70
ORANGE	75
ELECTRO HARMONIX (USA)	83
SOUND TECHNOLOGY	87
SYNERGY	93
STRINGS & THINGS	95
TC ELECTRONIC	96
ELIXIR	105
D’ADDARIO	109
BASS CENTRE	121
THOMANN	126,127
CARVIN	133
KORG	139
JHS	148
MANCHESTER BASS LOUNGE	148
SWAN SONG GUITARS	153
PEDULLA	153
SKJOLD DESIGN	157
SADOWSKY	157
MADISON AND FITH	157
SIMS	163
ROTOSOUNAD	164

Afterword

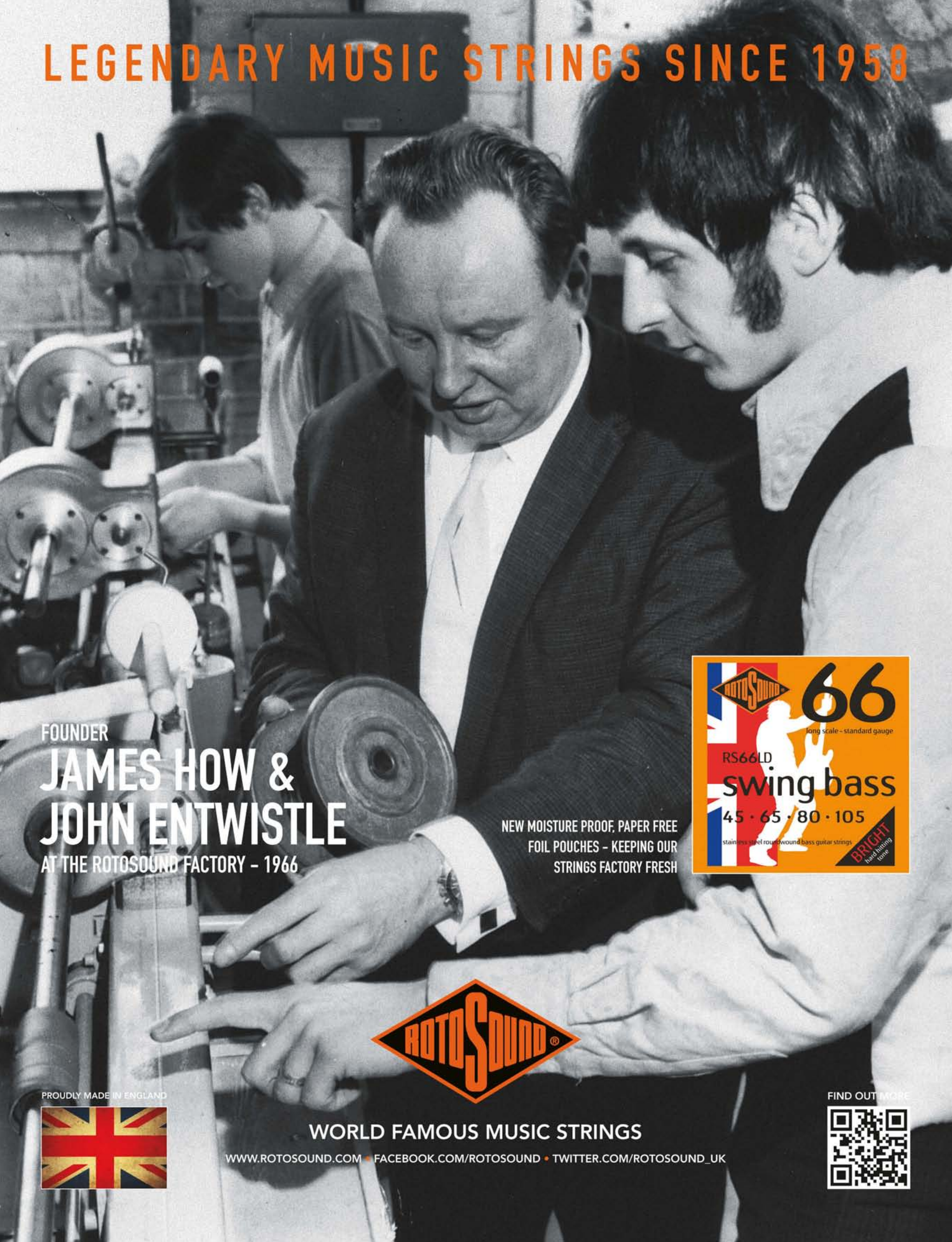
I love reading about music. Not so much the 'how to play' stuff, though I enjoy that as well – more the 'why'. Those are the stories that have caused the biggest shifts in my own music. Not someone hipping me to new chord substitutions or some awesome new slap trick. More, the people who struggled with finding their own voice, wrestling with how to take whatever it was they wanted to say about the world and turn it into sound.

Because of those people, that's been my project from the beginning: making sense of the world around me with music. Instrumental music begins when I run out of words. Music is the language, but bass is my voice, my accent, my dialect. So naturally, I gravitate towards the stories of bassists wrestling with this stuff. From Michael Manring to Tony Levin, Mike Watt to Alex Webster, I'm grateful to the wisdom and perspective of my fellow bassists in helping me figure out what music is for. I'm still figuring it out, it's all still evolving, but the process is a whole lot of fun. I love trying to create a life in which I get to make more music, where the trends and fashions of the wider music industries are of no interest or relevance. Their project is not my project. I play bass on my own – a path that sounds more like a dare than a job – so I get to take the road less travelled. It's occasionally a rough road, but the scenery is amazing, and this bookazine – plus its sister publication, *Bass Guitar Magazine* – makes a fine guide.

Steve Lawson

www.stevelawson.net

ENFIELD GUITARS
Lionheart
CUSTOM SHOP
Series
4&5 String
Basses
By
Martin Sims
ENFIELD GUITARS
Unit 20 Surrenden Manor Old Surrenden Manor Road Ashford Kent TN26 3DL Great Britain
Tel: +44(0)1233 822522 web:enfield.guitars email:martin@enfieldguitars.com


LEGENDARY MUSIC STRINGS SINCE 1958
FOUNDER
JAMES HOW &
JOHN ENTWISTLE
AT THE ROTOSOUND FACTORY - 1966
NEW MOISTURE PROOF, PAPER FREE
FOIL POUCHES - KEEPING OUR
STRINGS FACTORY FRESH
ROTOSOUND
66
long scale - standard gauge
RS66LD
swing bass
45 · 65 · 80 · 105
stainless steel roundwound bass guitar strings
BRIGHT
hard hitting tone
ROTOSOUND®
PROUDLY MADE IN ENGLAND
WORLD FAMOUS MUSIC STRINGS
WWW.ROTOSOUND.COM • FACEBOOK.COM/ROTOSOUND • TWITTER.COM/ROTOSOUND_UK
FIND OUT MORE